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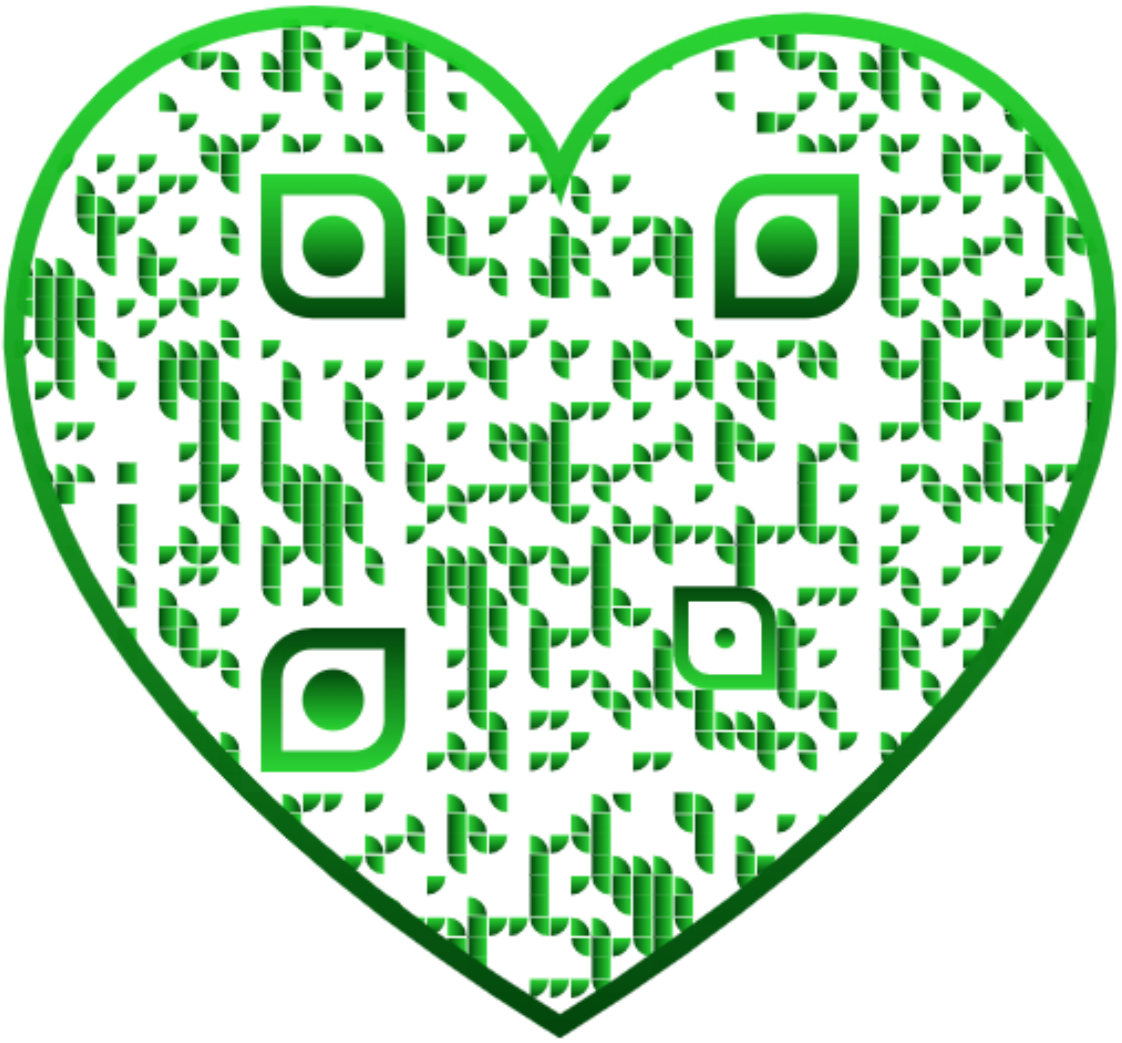

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The name of the game

Regular readers may have noticed that there's a slightly different logo on the cover of the magazine this month. *Guitar & Bass* is no more and we are once again *The Guitar Magazine*. We've also got a new online home at theguitarmagazine.com and if you want to get in touch, theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com is our new address for email correspondence. Any changes are in name only – rest assured that whether you're a veteran road warrior, home hobbyist or just starting out, we'll continue to deliver your essential monthly fix of the best and most in-depth new gear reviews in the business, along with DIY tutorials, tone and playing tips, artist interviews, profiles of gorgeous vintage instruments and a whole lot more besides that you won't find anywhere else.

Once you've read and digested this month's mag from cover to cover, if you want to hear plenty of new and vintage gear in action and get advice on how to be a better player from guitar stars such as Martin Taylor, JD Simo and Dan Patlansky, head over to youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and hit the 'subscribe' button for great new videos every week. We're keen to find out what guitar videos you'd like to see, so please drop me a line and we'll try to make the best ideas happen. Here's hoping for an influx of requests for poolside gear demos in tropical locations. How does the neck pickup sound after that third mojito? It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p12

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker

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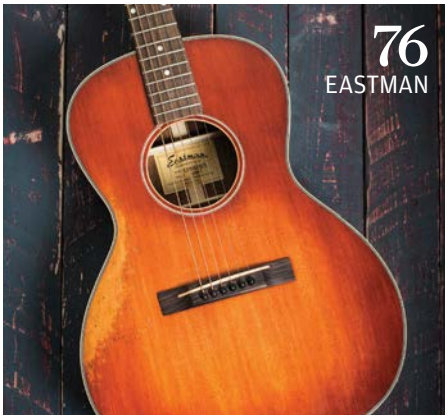

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The Guitar Magazine

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THE *Money Shot*

GRETSCH CUSTOM SHOP '56 G6128 DUO JET RELIC

Every encounter that we've had with one of Stephen Stern's Gretsch Custom Shop creations has been a truly breathtaking experience, and this instrument is no exception. Available from Guitar Village in Farnham, this Duo Jet Relic is modelled closely on a vintage original, but is an arguably more stable and playable proposition than many 1950s Jets we've strapped on. Exquisitely aged, the timeless cool of the guitar's aesthetic is matched by a glorious 'Fat C' neck profile and when you plug in, you are rewarded with to-die-for twang and punch. Don't be intimidated by the fixed-arm Bigsby either: there's an optional swivel arm in the case. The price of admission? At £3,810 it's a serious investment, but not as big a step up from production line prices as you might expect. For more, visit guitarvillage.co.uk.

GRETSCH

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WIN

A *Shergold Masquerader SM02-SD* WORTH £835!

This month we're giving one lucky reader the chance to win a fantastic Shergold SM02-SD solidbody electric designed by legendary UK luthier Patrick James Eggle. The original Shergold guitars were used by the likes of Mike Rutherford and Bernard Sumner back in the company's heyday, but now the brand has been reborn thanks to UK distributor Barnes & Mullins, and seeks to offer something a little different from the guitar shop status quo.

Shergold's first salvo is a three-guitar range base on the revived Masquerader model – though it's very different from the vintage originals. "I wanted to bring it up to date and make it a bit more relevant," Patrick James Eggle told us. "And I didn't think the original design would fit my criteria as a player's guitar." Case in point is the SM02 we're giving away this month – with its solid mahogany body and rosewood neck, Bakelite scratchplate, Seymour Duncan pickups and see-through Dirty Blonde finish, it's not your average HSS guitar.

TGM's Simon Bradley was suitably impressed with the Shergold in his review last month, saying that it was, "a refreshingly new approach to the HSS-configured electric".

If you fancy standing out from the crowd by rocking his reborn piece of British guitar heritage, visit www.shergoldguitars.com to find out more. And to be in with a chance of winning one yourself, simply visit the link below and answer the following question.

guitar-bass.net/comps/shergold

Competition question:
How many guitars are there in the new Shergold Masquerader range?
A Three **B** Five **C** One

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HUNTER & THE BEAR

A young British four-piece who embrace arena band comparisons and diverse musical influences. **JOSH GARDNER** joins the hunt...

Since they burst onto the scene in 2014, Hunter & The Bear's riff-tastic rock stylings have often drawn comparisons with Biffy Clyro, but for guitarist Jimmy Hunter, those associations are as much geographical as musical. "I'm quite literally from the same town, born and bred, as Simon [Neil]," he explains. "It's my absolute pleasure to be compared to the Biff. I love that they're from my neck of the woods. It makes it seem at least slightly possible growing up watching guys from your town do it."

H&TB started out as a duo with Jimmy and fellow Scot, Will Irvine. After taking it as far as they could with Will on vocals and the pair sharing guitar duties, they headed to London, and picked up drummer Gareth Thompson when they saw him playing in Ronnie Scott's, and metal-loving bassist Chris Clark. But the lessons the pair learned when it was just the two of them still hold true today.

"I think having nowhere to hide helped us focus," Jimmy affirms. "We put in the work and focused on songwriting first. Playing a solo on an acoustic, while your pal plays rhythm, in front of a crowd who don't care who you are, makes you learn pretty quickly that you'd better do something interesting!

These days, however, Jimmy is reaping the benefits of having a full band. "Those guys really know their shit," he says of Clark and Thompson. "Surrounding yourself with great players, for me, has been the biggest single positive factor on my playing."

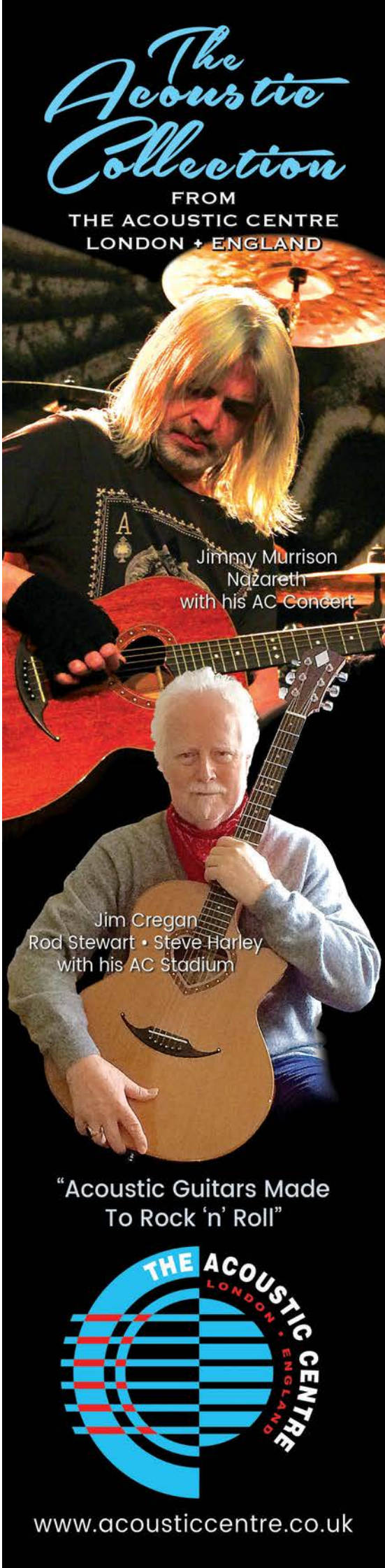
The progress made as a foursome is evident on new album, *Paper Heart*, with everything from thumping heavy rock to delicate acoustic baladry in evidence over the 10 tracks.

"The diversity on the record probably does have something to do with our individual influences," Jimmy explains. "I think that songwriting is an expression of a time or a place or a person – or all of the above. I think everyone has a little bit of everything in them and that's just how the songs came out. We feel like we've chosen not only the 'best' 10 songs we had but the 10 songs that most honestly represent our time while writing and recording the album. There were lots of ups and downs and a brilliant part of being a songwriter, for me, is the ability to embrace the downs and write your way out of them."

When it comes to gear, Jimmy favours Les Pauls and SGs. "When I was 10 and first really started to get into rock music it was all about Angus Young and Jimmy Page," he explains. "The sound of a Les Paul is the one. It gives me what I want every time and it looks beautiful doing it. We tune down a half step for a few tunes on the record and it makes the SG sound like the devil she is. And, y'know: Angus fucking Young played one!"

With their blend of powerful hooks, singalong choruses, and an innate grasp of light and shade, you wouldn't bet against them bringing that devil to bigger and bigger stages over the next few years.

Try if you like Biffy Clyro



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

65AMPS PRODUCER EL

US boutique mainstay 65Amps offers US cleans and British raunch in one package. **DAVE HUNTER** gets to grips with an amp that promises player-friendly refinements that you won't find on the vintage originals...

As the company ploughs into its second decade as a respected name on the boutique amp scene, 65Amps has already carved out a reputation for robust tones packed into original takes on the classics of vintage British and American tube amplifiers – but without ever copying or cloning an existing model. Indeed, if co-founders Dan Boul and Peter Stroud have a 'thing' that sets their company apart, it's likely found in the way they pack added depth and increased versatility into amps that not only deliver archetypal golden-era sounds, but will also do so much more.

Both 65Amps men are guitar players – Stroud the long-time guitarist with Sheryl Crow no less – and the pair share an affinity for the great Vox, Marshall, Fender and Ampeg amps of old that helped lay the foundations of rock 'n' roll. But rather than slavish recreations, they couch that love in a practical appreciation of what today's guitarist really needs from an amp to get the gig done.

One persistent theme there is volume – or more precisely, how to get less of it while still sounding huge. Players still dig big-boned tone, but even on the big tours it's harder to achieve that at the blistering volume levels of old given today's drive toward lower stage volumes.

And that's a big part of our featured amp's raison d'être: it takes direct aim at today's guitarists' needs to sound great without sounding too loud. 65Amps have exported some amps to the UK for a while now, but the model we're looking at here is a rare bird on these shores. The Producer EL has been around for a few years in the States, but after several years development, it's now essentially is only made to order. Given that, it's perhaps no surprise that it's one of the firm's pricier offerings, but it delivers on sound and function commensurate with that outlay, and it makes use of some clever tricks do its thing.

The Producer runs its EL34s on a lower DC voltage, but very high current, giving the sound of a big rock head at much lower volumes

The Producer EL is a two-channel, footswitchable amp delivering 28 watts from a pair of EL34s (Producer 6L and 84 models are also available, using 6L6s and EL84s respectively). Right within that simple description lies much of this amp's intrigue, as well as its unique selling point. We would normally expect a fixed-bias dual-EL34 amp to produce up to twice as much wattage, and even a cathode-biased amp like this one to squeeze out another 10 watts or so, but 65Amps has intentionally underpowered this thing in order to meet the first premise outlined above. Using an unusual, custom-built power transformer from Mercury Magnetics, the Producer runs its EL34s on a much lower level of DC voltage, but very high current, enabling the output stage to obtain the crisp, punchy, articulate sound of a big rock head at significantly lower

KEY FEATURES

65Amps Producer EL

- **PRICE** £2,733 direct, excluding shipping and duties
- **CONTROLS** Ch 1: volume, treble, bass; Ch 2: volume, tone; master voltage; independent bump (boost) switches for each channel
- **OUTPUT** 28W
- **TUBES** 3x 12AX7 preamp tubes, 2x EL34 output tubes, solid-state rectification
- **FEATURES** Footswitchable channels and bump (boost), series effects loop, dual speaker outputs with switch for 8 and 16 ohms
- **WEIGHT** 18.6kg/41lbs
- **CONTACT** 65Amps.com

volume levels. From there, the player can lower the volume further still by dialling down the Master Voltage control, which further governs the tubes' operating voltages.

As for the front end, the amp's two channels seek to deliver another Holy Grail achievement sought by many modern guitar amps: American-style cleans from one, and British-style crunch and lead from the other. To help do this, the Producer's designers have taken a rather interesting route, giving each a simplified layout with no full TMB tone stack anywhere, just volume, treble and bass on channel one, and volume and tone on channel two. There's no 'level' or 'master' control on either individual channel – you crank them up old-school to get the juice flowing, and dial in your overall output at the master voltage. Each channel has a pull-bright function on its volume pot, and a front-panel bump switch to enact a preset boost, which is also selectable from the two-button footswitch (included). And that's it. Round back are dual speaker >

The Producer's simple control layout has just just volume, treble and bass on channel one, and an even more stripped-back tone and volume on channel two

outs with a switch to select either eight ohms or 16 ohms, and send and return jacks for the series effects loop.

Styling is traditional 65Amps, with black 'n' cream covering and the dual aluminium vent grilles that have become the company's trademark of sorts. Some love 'em, some don't – we think they're pretty cool, and they quickly set any 65Amps creation apart on stage. Many would argue, though, that this amp's greater beauty lies within, and there's certainly a lot to appreciate once you slide the Producer's rugged aircraft-grade-aluminium chassis from its shell.

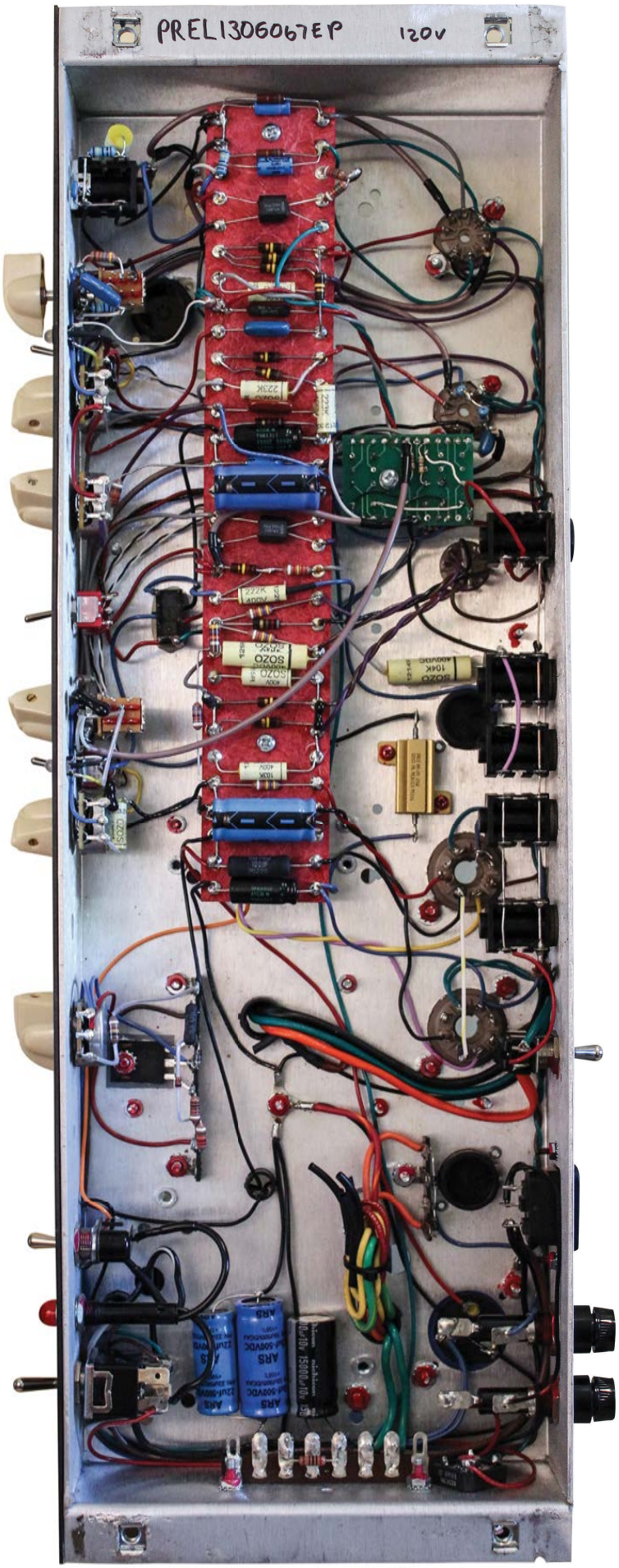
Despite each channel's relative simplicity – after all, there are no more knobs on this thing than on a vintage JTM45 or a tweed Bassman – there's a lot going on inside. Put another way, although there are certainly some clever tricks and plenty of originality going on here, the circuit behind each channel is actually relatively straightforward. That said, the 'support staff' gives plenty for the solder junkie to investigate – with the master voltage circuit, channel switching, bump, and other functions laced in and around what is otherwise a meticulously hand-wired eyelet board. Boul and Stroud have long been fans of SoZo signal caps, and they are much in evidence here – shoulder-to-shoulder with a mix of carbon-comp and carbon-film resistors, and quality ARS filter caps, all strung together with Teflon-shielded wire. Like the power transformer, the output transformer and choke are both custom-built units from Mercury Magnetics of Chatsworth, California – a Los Angeles suburb that just up I-405 from 65Amps' Huntington Park headquarters.

We tested the Producer EL with a Strat, a Les Paul, and a Novo Serus J loaded with vintage 1959 P-90s, through a 2x12 cab with early 80s Celestion G12-65s and a StoneAge 1x12 with an EV SRO. You wouldn't say it's dead-on Fender Blackface one side, nor entirely Vox or Marshall the other; but in my estimation each channel presents a more usable and dialed-in amalgam of its target voice than you're likely to get even from the vintage archetype. Which is to say, the thing sounds great, it's superbly playable, and it delivers mightily in gig-worthy tone.

Purists will prefer the real article, or any number of detail-perfect clones available – but this one's for the players. And this player's assessment is that it nails that ephemeral 'tone in your head' – the idealized notion of the left- and right-of-the-Atlantic sounds that often prove more satisfying than the real thing.

Purists will prefer the real article, or any number of detail-perfect clones available – but this one's for the players

Channel one is thick, bold and warm, yet with a funky crispness and articulation when kept clean, and a rich, tweedy growl when pushed with an advanced volume setting. Channel two can be dialled between very convincing Vox-to-Marshall template – obtaining extremely toothsome, vintage-leaning lead tones with sweetly harmonic saturation when pushed. The bump feature works great, making each channel a hotter, more delectable rendition of itself, and the master voltage on this amp yields one of the more effective output-reduction methods we've experienced. Full up, the Producer EL moves enough air to cut through in nearly any large gig; but it also retains its sonic body, girth and dynamic splendour down to small-club and studio levels. It isn't entirely disappointing at near-whisper 'bedroom' levels either: although nothing ever sounds as good that quiet. All in all, the Producer EL is simply a great sounding amp, and one that's very easy to dial in a wide range of situations, and that's saying a lot right there.



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Gary Walker

- **TEST INSTRUMENT** Strymon Zuma High Current DC Power Supply
- **BAND** Cerulean
- **PRICE** £249
- **MAIN GUITARS & AMPS USED** Gretsch Players Edition Tennessee Rose, Fender Telecaster, Fender Hot Rod Deluxe III
- **SESSIONS SO FAR** Recording session

Test **Pilots**

STRYMON ZUMA

What sort of person gets excited about power supplies? Well this one's made by Strymon, so we know just the man. **GARY WALKER** tries out the high-horsepower Zuma...

It would be something of an understatement to say I'm a fan of Strymon's pedals. The BigSky is the most important pedal on my board, and I've added a TimeLine as my main delay. I've also been eyeing up the Flint tremolo/reverb, which would take the spend past the £1,000 mark for three pedals. Big money, but you get what you pay for. However, the best part of £250 for a power supply is pushing it, surely?

Perhaps not. The Zuma has a whopping nine isolated outputs, each providing 500mA of current and each with its own dedicated regulator and transformer. Also, Strymon claims that its all-analogue circuitry and two stages of isolation eliminates ground loop and AC line noise issues.

My current T-Rex Fuel Tank has done the job so far, but with the power-hungry Strymons each requiring their own output with a minimum of 300mA and six other pedals on my board, including the thirsty EHX Super Pulsar, there's a lot of daisy-chaining going on. Strymon advises against daisy chains for its power-hungry pedals, and after some disconcerting noises in the rehearsal room, I've even taken to running the TimeLine on its own wall wart for gigs, to be on the safe side. Not ideal.

The Chameleon has served me well, then, but with its five 300mA I'm one impulse pedal purchase away from trouble. The Zuma is only a touch bigger than the Chameleon. It comes with nine right-angle-to-straight power leads and velcro'd neatly on the corner of my 'board – Strymon also offers brackets for mounting underneath PedalTrain-style 'boards.

The first big test was a recording session, and I'm pleased to report that with the Zuma running the show, the rat's nest of wires was a thing of the past, there were no hums or buzzes and my pedals have never sounded so good.

With the Zuma running the show there were no hums or buzzes and my pedals have never sounded so good

Strymon may well have built the ultimate power supply. Sure, it's a lot of money, but the confidence that comes from each pedal having its own isolated output justifies the price if you're gigging or recording regularly. The fact that two of the Zuma's outputs can be switched to 12V or 18V has also made me curious, as the Fulltone OCD takes 18V power very well. After all, the Zuma has nine outputs, and I'm using only eight so far...

Rival Sons will headline the Grooverider Stage at Ramblin' Man Fair

RAMBLE ON

The 2017 Ramblin' Man Fair aims to be a festival by rock fans, for rock fans

Over the British summer time, it seems like every spare field, country estate and car park is transformed into a festival venue catering to every musical taste and subgenre – but Ramblin' Man Fair claims to offer a unique proposition. It's a festival designed for rock fans, for rock fans.

Now in its third year, Ramblin' Man Fair will bring an unmissable blend of rock, prog, blues and country artists together in the picturesque surroundings of Maidstone's Mote Park, about an hour south of London. With the likes of Whitesnake, Jethro Tull and Thin Lizzy all appearing in previous years, classic rock fans can expect to be well catered for this year, but that's not all.

Friday's abbreviated line-up sees NWOBHM pioneers Saxon headline the Planet Rock Main Stage, and the big names keep on coming throughout the weekend, with Nuno Bettencourt's Extreme closing out a second day that sees Black Star Riders, Reef and Dokken take to the main stage, while fittingly the Sunday will see the Reverend Billy F Gibbons bring ZZ Top to minister to the survivors.

But Ramblin' Man Fair is about more than classic rock legends – throughout the weekend, various themed stages will bring the best of blues, prog and country to Mote Park, while the Rising Stage showcases some of the hottest new blues-rock acts around. As you'd expect, there's so much for guitar fans to enjoy – Saturday's Outlaw Country stage is headlined by US blues king Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and Rival Sons will showcase Scott Holiday's filthy blues-rock stylings over on the Grooverider Stage. Sunday's blues stage sees Joanne Shaw Taylor top the bill and if your tastes are a little proggier, the Prog In The Park stage melds together the diverse talents of guitar phenomenon Devin Townsend, plus classic acts Magnum and Focus among others.

With over 60 acts playing over the course of the three days, the only question will be how you'll find time to sample everything else the festival has to offer. Ramblin' Man Fair promises the best food and drink options, including its own beer festival, and you can even indulge in some glamping if that's your want.

Ramblin' Man Fair 2017 takes place on 28 to 30 July, and weekend tickets are available now for £150, or £250 for a VIP ticket, which gives you access to a VIP Area with luxury toilets, food and promises of exclusive acoustic performances. Camping and glamping are available on site for an extra charge, and day tickets are also available – don't miss it!

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.ramblinmanfair.com

READER BOARDS

When Norwegian guitarist **TOM WAHL** found himself stuck with a rat's nest of cables that was just stressing him out, he decided to chuck it all in and went back to basics...

KIT LIST

Tom Wahl

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  TC Electronic PolyTune
  DigiTech Drop
  Electro-Harmonix Small Stone Nano
  Friedman BE-OD
  Boss CE-2 (1979, silver screw, long dash, black label)
  TC Electronic Flashback Delay
  ISP Decimator ProRack G (in effects loop, not pictured)
- **PATCH CABLES**
  George L's, Fender Custom Shop
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  Cioks Baby power supply
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  PedalTrain PT-JR

What inspired this set-up?
"I used to have an Eventide TimeFactor and ISP Decimator ProRackG going into the effects-loop, and I had seven cables going in and out, back and forth between the pedals and the amp. It was too much stress during the gigs, so I wanted to make things easier for myself. I have three bands playing in different styles and tunings, so hopefully I've finally found the ultimate set-up. Everything is going in the front of the amp now, so I'm very happy with my 'board. Much simpler."

Tell us about the journey...
"There have been many changes and I've bought and sold a lot of pedals, just to try different stuff and find pedals that I like. I did find that compressors and boosts aren't for me, and I struggled to find the right overdrive. I also lost focus at one point and started to experiment with stereo effects. But slowly I started to find pedals that could stay on my board for a long time – like the Small Stone, which is my favourite pedal. I probably use it way too often!

"When I bought the Friedman BE-OD, I knew right away this was the overdrive/distortion pedal for me, I just couldn't put my guitar down. It's more of a high-gain pedal, but it has a trim pot inside where you can turn down the gain, so it's quite versatile. It sounds awesome, so no more low/mid-gain OD-pedals for me, at least for a while."

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?
"Not really, but you'll never know when that GAS strikes again! I have been playing around with different fuzz pedals lately, but I don't think I'll be having a fuzz on my board permanently – only for experimenting in studio!"

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"My main guitars are a Maybach Lester Gold Rush, a Gibson Flying V I've had for 23 years and my ESP M-I. I also have a Gibson Firebird at my rehearsal room for when I'm not able or bothered to bring a guitar, that's what the Drop pedal is for. Everything goes into my Fryette Sig:X and Port City 4x12 cab."

What lessons have you learned putting this 'board together?
"That those pedal shows on YouTube should come with a warning – it may get expensive! Also, that it doesn't matter how cool the pedal is if it doesn't work in your band. Buy used, and if it doesn't work for you, you can just sell it and buy something else. Oh, and that I like it simple!"

The Guitar Magazine SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com**

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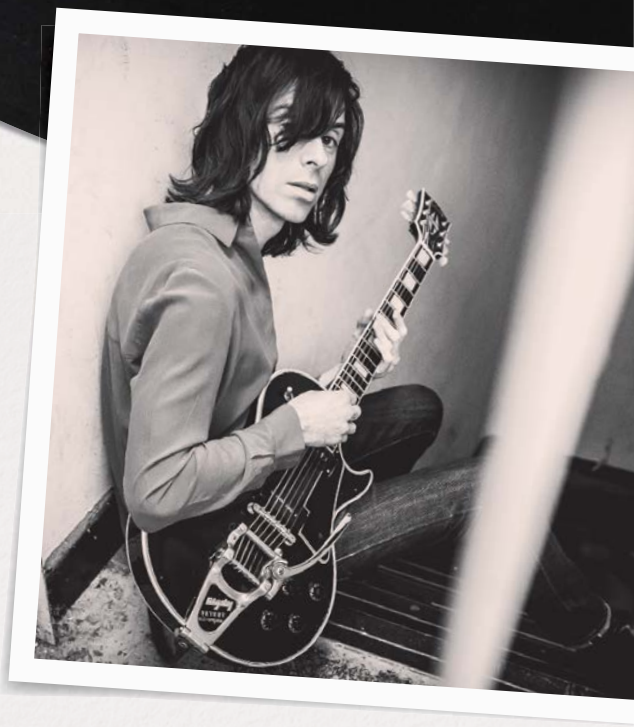
SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Barrie Cadogan

The Little Barrie and Primal Scream guitarist on the records that shaped him as a musician



Barrie Cadogan is a guitar player who has worn many hats in his career to date – from playing guitar with Primal Scream to composing the twangtastic theme tune to *Breaking Bad* spin-off, *Better Call Saul*. But the constant presence throughout that time has been Little Barrie – the R&B three-piece the Nottingham-born guitarist has fronted to four acclaimed albums. Their latest album, *Death Express* is out on 7 July, and here Barrie tells us about the records that have influenced him on his musical journey...

The Jimi Hendrix Experience
ELECTRIC LADYLAND

"My all time favourite album. I love the writing, the playing and the production. Jimi was way ahead of other guitar players in terms of his vision as a producer and arranger. You can hear his love for soul, R&B, gospel, jazz and rock 'n' roll turned into something bold, new and completely his own. There's the depth of blues, but also a sound of the future in *Voodoo Child* and *Rainy Day*. A masterpiece."

The Stone Roses
THE STONE ROSES

"This inspired me to learn the guitar. I was at school when this came out. My sister played it constantly, so I started asking her to play it for me. I got fascinated by their personalities, the way they played together and the black and white photos on the album sleeve, especially John Squire and his Country Gentleman. John was the guitar hero that got things rolling. I asked for a guitar that Christmas."

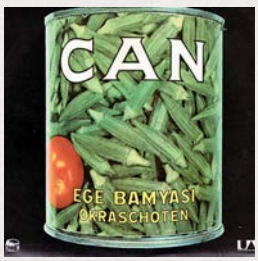
Dinosaur Jr
YOU'RE LIVING ALL OVER ME

"The Roses led me into my sister's record collection. I realised that not all rock music was like the horrible stuff on the radio. It was my first exposure to a vintage fuzz. I love the way their music can be sonically brutal but full of melody. J Mascis' solos really take you somewhere, amongst the chaos of fuzz and feedback are really lyrical guitar lines. He's one of the masters of the Jazzmaster, along with Kev Shields."

The Smiths
HATFUL OF HOLLOW

"I'd been listening to The Smiths before, but it was only when I went back to them after starting to play that I realised the genius of Johnny Marr. This album shows a more raw, stripped down Smiths than the first album. *Still Ill* was a song I couldn't stop playing or trying to figure out on guitar. There's so many different sides to Johnny's playing. No one can play like him – a master and a true original."

Can
EGE BAMYASI



"I'd read comparisons of the Roses to Can, so I went out and bought *Ege Bamyasi*. I was totally blown away, It's so futuristic. The first track I heard was *Vitamin C*. It was dark and funky but nothing like R&B or rock 'n' roll. They had a rock band's gear, but had a sound of their own – a million miles from the usual American roots influences that were the foundation of most bands at the time."

Howlin' Wolf
MOANIN' IN THE MOONLIGHT

"Wolf's vocals are unbeatable, most of the songs are his, too, and the list of guitar players is legendary. Lee Cooper's looping riff on *No Place To Go* makes it even more powerful. It's almost unbelievable to think *Moanin' At Midnight* and *How Many More Years* were recorded in 1951. People talk about later rock music being heavy, but *I Asked For Water, She Gave Me Gasoline* is about a heavy as it gets."

The Stooges
FUN HOUSE

"Another album that I can't believe is as old as it is. Way too far ahead of the curve for the time, but more influential than ever now. Pure wild unhinged rock 'n' roll with tons of soul. The energy leaps out at you when you play this record. The mean minimalism of Ron Asheton's riffs make the music even more potent. It's a perfect document of high energy band on top form captured on record."

The Meters
THE METERS

"This record proves that a heavy, powerful sound doesn't always come from tons of gain and loads of notes. Through The Meters and James Brown I became interested in leaving out strumming and allowing rhythm to breathe. Leo Nocentelli has also inspired a lot of guitar runs and tones that I use. Through this album I discovered other great New Orleans artists, like Lee Dorsey, Dr John, Eddie Bo and Earl King."

The Beastie Boys
CHECK YOUR HEAD

"Another strong record, rhythmically. I love the rawness of it, their use of samples as hooks alongside playing live instruments. They're like a hip-hop garage band. *Jimmy James* is genius, a mixture of Hendrix samples and a scratch DJ transforming them. That massively influenced our new album, along with the chopped up, syncopated rhythms and their use of fuzz and heavy drums, like on *Stand Together*."

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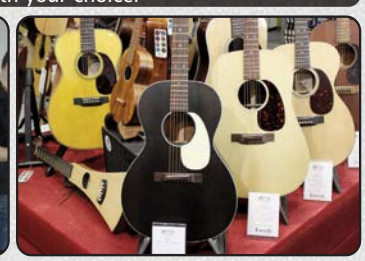

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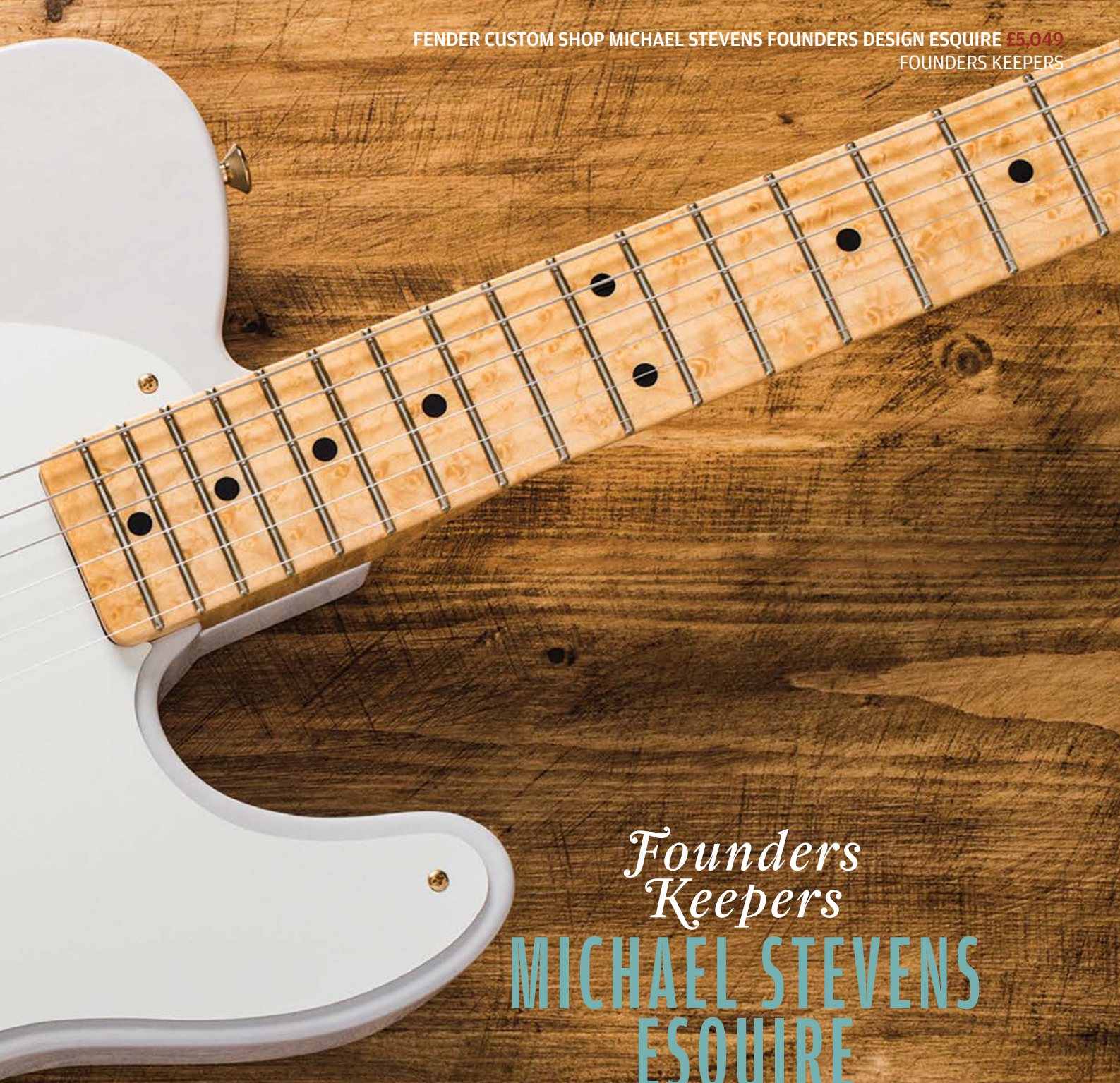


Founders Keepers
MICHAEL STEVENS ESQUIRE

The Fender Custom Shop is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a limited run of guitars designed by the Master Builders who helped establish it. Chris Vinnicombe plays the first, and meets its maker...

It's 30 years since Fender established its hugely influential Custom Shop, some 40 or so miles east of Los Angeles in the town once considered the 'lemon capital of the world'. The mission was simple: to produce electric guitars in Corona that would roll back the years and shake off the perceived shortcomings of the company's much maligned CBS era. From a background in vintage instruments and repairs in Texas, the widely-respected Michael Stevens was recruited in 1986 as the Custom Shop's senior design engineer, a decision that Stevens says "made vintage heads turn".

Although Fender was serious about recapturing the mojo of Leo's prime, the first Custom Shop guitars were made by Stevens and a small team in his garage. Nevertheless they would soon be building instruments for the likes of Danny Gatton, Waylon Jennings and Eric Clapton. "On the late nights it could get goofy," Stevens remembers, "but everybody was there working like a dog, whether they were getting goofy or not." >

During the process of creating the Eric Clapton Stratocaster, Stevens made the necks that were approved by Slowhand himself, and he even go to spend some quality time with the Brit blues legend's fabled 'Blackie': "I got to sleep with Blackie under my bed and my gun under my pillow... nobody could get it!"

Stevens clearly has great affection for those early days, during which he was able to mine a treasure trove of artifacts from Fullerton. "Fender still had tonnes of stuff left over from Leo," he recalls. "Tooling and machinery and templates... there weren't many drawings – he and Freddie [Tavares] would draw it on meat paper and cut it out and that was that. It wasn't until CBS sent in their blueprint guys in about '65 that there were blueprints. Collecting all that stuff was fun. It was strewn all over the place. There must have been half a dozen variations on Tele Thinlines that I found templates for. Teles with Strat vibratos that never saw the light of day. Prototype five-strings. They experimented. They didn't just do one and run with it. They were doing stuff back then that I was doing later thinking that I was cool!"

Three decades later, Stevens' Founders Design Esquire sees him pay tribute to a favourite electric and also tip his hat to the first instrument he built for the Custom Shop: a Strat/Esquire double-neck with Mary Kaye cosmetics bearing the serial number 0001.

"I had an Esquire a long time ago, a dirty one with a thermometer case. I've got a picture of it sitting against an old beat-up tweed amp that I've had forever and ever. I don't have the guitar anymore. And when I first got to Fender I did the double-neck. Before that, I had customers in Austin that really loved Esquires. I did a lot of work on them, messing with the controls and set-ups and stuff.

"So I was working on the Founders Design model and it dawned on me that it was half of 0001, the first guitar I came up with over there! So then I decided to go a little further with that and do the sassafras and the cutaway thing in the back so it's more ergonomic without ruining it from the front, 'cause I really think that Teles and Esquires are the coolest guitars in the world... that I didn't design [laughs]."

Sassafras may be a relatively uncommon tonewood, but it has heritage at Fender, as Michael explains: "When I was in the vintage business I ran into some early April '54 Strats that were sassafras. It grows in the same area you'd find ash. I figure a board just got mixed up and it came into Fender and they just ran the bodies. Why not? It was a different look on some of those '54s. When this model came along I thought, that's what I want to do. It's got a different scoop to the tone. It's got it's own voice and it really rings.

"The sustain on it's great. It's heavier, generally than swamp ash, although you get some white ash that weighs about eight pounds before you even put a neck on it! This wood lies in a medium-ish range, like alder. A seven and a half or eight pound guitar doesn't bother me at all – the world's full of 'em."

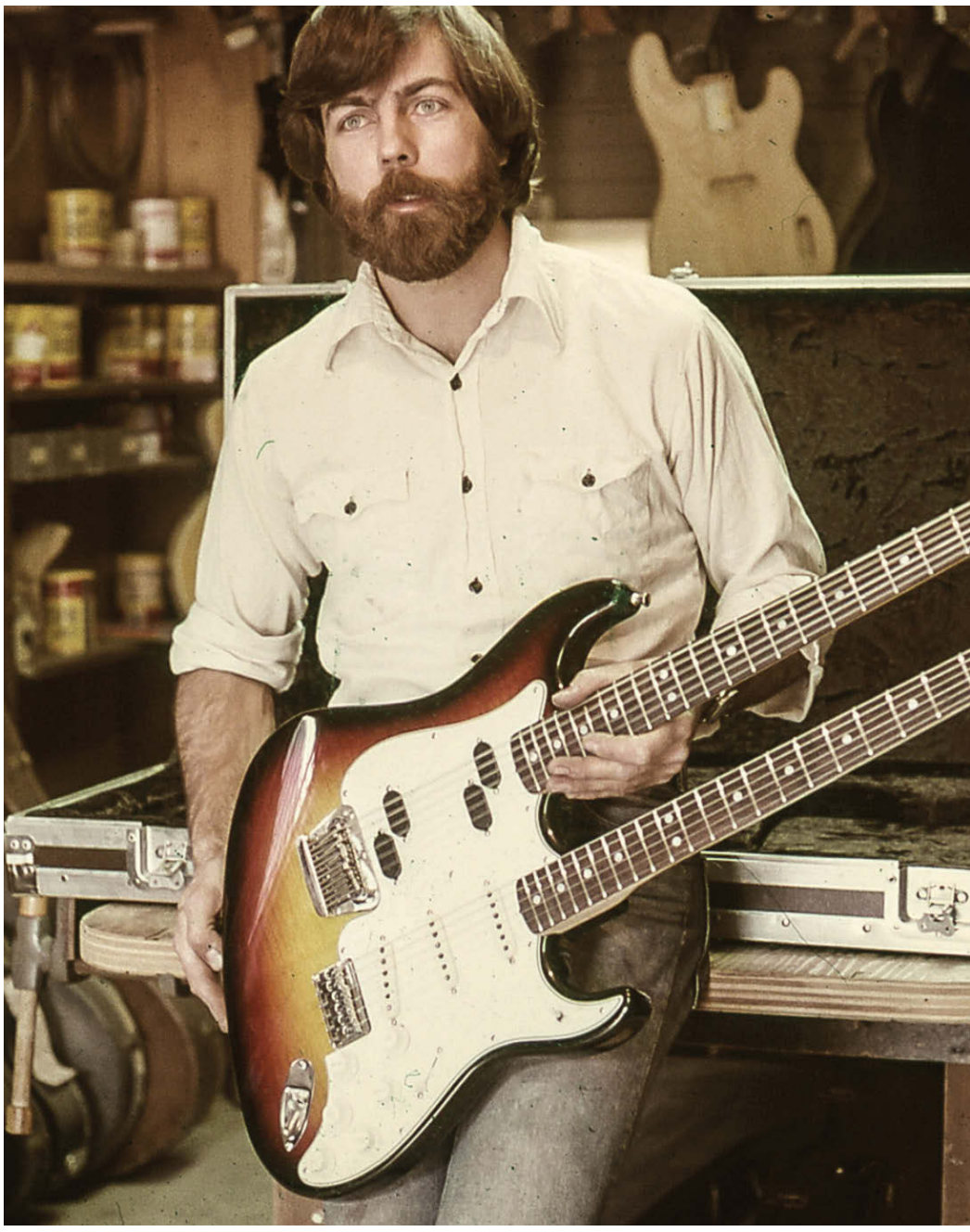
In Use

Our sample model weighs in at approximately 7.6lbs. Given that we've played blackguards that are well into Les Paul territory, this sassafras-bodied Esquire's weight is a non-issue. Additional player comfort is derived from the rear contouring's form-hugging lines, which are particularly noticeable when played in a seated position.

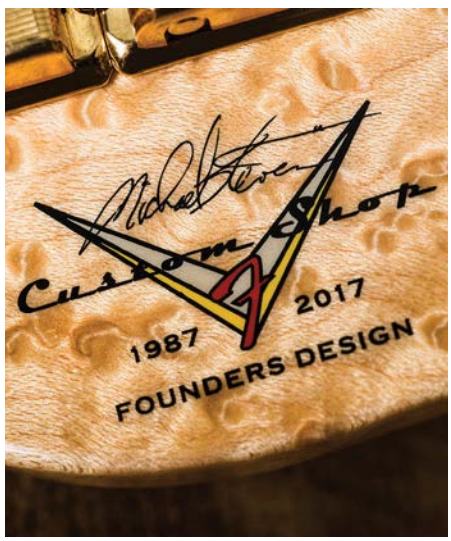
Acoustically, there's a vocal quality to single notes while chords bark without sounding at all scratchy. The Esquire's birdseye maple neck offers a supremely comfortable ride with its 50s meat subtly dressed away at the shoulder, delivering a soft-V that you'll want to play the hell out of.

Plugged in, the reverse-slanted bridge pickup no doubt helps the guitar deliver tones with a sweet but still clear and cutting high end, and serious twang on the bass strings – the latter can of course be attenuated in the middle setting by rolling back the tone control a couple of notches. The guitar's third voice is an intriguing, slightly nasal tone that works well with gain and sounds excellent for faux pedal-steel licks into spring reverb and even single note runs with a hint of exotic psychedelia.

Michael Stevens has proved here that there's still plenty of room for Leo's original solidbody electric in a modern context and added a few pleasing tweaks informed by decades of experience at the highest level of solidbody guitar making. Hats off...



Opposite page **Michael back in the day with a double-neck he made for Christopher Cross**
Main image **The rear contouring on Michael's Esquire makes for a more comfortable seated playing experience than the traditional slab**
Bottom left **The guitar is a tribute to the first guitar Michael made at the Custom Shop – a Mary Kaye-style double-neck**
Bottom middle **"I've used contrary-slanted pickups for a long time," says Michael. "I'm not a fan of the standard pickup where the high string is really brittle and bright"**
Bottom right **Michael's Founders Design Esquire is the first of eight models, each limited to just 30 pieces**



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HIGHAM LEGEND

As Darrel Higham returns with a brand new album, *Hell's Hotel,* **SIMON BRADLEY** catches up with the UK rockabilly maestro to chat recording techniques, his myriad influences, and a sumptuous new Gretsch guitar...

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Whether doing his thing with the impossibly authentic quartet, Bob & The Bearcats, fronting his hero Eddie Cochran's backing band, The Kelly Four, playing with Stray Cats drummer Slim Jim Phantom in The Katmen, or sharing the stage with the likes of Jeff Beck and Brian Setzer, Darrel Higham has always kept it utterly real.

He remains a leading light within the UK rockabilly scene and, until recently, acted as a musical touchstone for Irish songstress Imelda May. Over the course of a number of eminently-listenable albums, his unmistakable Gretsch-flavoured licks and chord work helped give her wonderful voice and emotive songs an uncommon bedrock for modern popular music, with shows at the Royal Albert Hall, as well as collaborations with a slew of household names, only part of the resultant success.

Watch The Changes

Sadly, however, nothing lasts forever, and following a personal and professional split with Imelda, Darrel finds himself back at the helm of his own musical ship. Some things don't change, however, and it's no surprise that his brand new solo album, *Hell's Hotel*, sounds as if it's been dipped in Pomade and marinated in the exhaust of a 1956 Ford Thunderbird, before being festooned with maple shavings from the old Gretsch factory floor in Brooklyn.

It comes as no surprise that Darrel's first post-Imelda record is one that sees him dive head-first into the rockabilly that he knows so well – indeed he admits it was a welcome distraction from his personal life.

"It was just great to be busy," he says with a sigh. "To be able to take your mind off things and really get stuck in to a project is very therapeutic, and it helped immeasurably, I have to say."

> "I can write a song, step back from it and not think about it afterwards because, to me, it's for the listener to decide what it means to them"

Even then, however, it was hard for him not to notice the difference between writing with Imelda and writing on his own.

"I'm a very different songwriter, inasmuch as I don't write about me," he explains. "The songs might sound like they're about me, but, like a lot of songwriters, I tend to write about love; falling in love, falling out of love. We've all done it so we can all relate to it. I don't write political songs and I don't really want to; I try to keep it as entertaining as possible. I can write a song, step back from it and not think about it afterwards because, to me, it's for the listener to decide whether it means something to them. Some songwriters will say 'This is about me', while others will say 'I hope this is about you', and that's how I tend to look at it.

>

"I have a notepad containing ideas that I've scribbled down over the years and a lot of the songs on *Hell's Hotel* came from just finishing some of them off." He continues. "I also had a few days where I went into the studio by myself, very quietly with just my acoustic, and came up with some ideas, but generally the album came together very quickly."

Modern Retro

If you were to cut Higham in half, he'd have the word 'rockabilly' written through him like a stick of rock, but not so much of a retro-naut that he eschews modern recording techniques and technology: his live effects come from a Zoom G2, after all. Using his own Embassy Studios and roping in noted knob-twiddler Graham Dominy to co-produce, there were no monolithic reel-to-reel consoles to wrestle with.

"No, it was all recorded on Pro Tools and we spent as much time on it as we possibly could," he confirms. "I really wanted it to be very polished rather than an authentic-sounding rockabilly album – because I make those anyway! This needed to be something that would appeal to a broader audience and I'm very pleased we had the time to do it."

Rather than swapping copious amps and effects in and out as many players tend to do, Higham was able to obtain wildly differing sounds with the imaginative use of microphone combinations on his trusty Peavey Delta Blues combo. Just compare the smooth and round tone of *When You Smile* with the more abrasive rasp evident throughout *And The Angles Cried*: both are perfectly suited to the vibe of the track in question yet intrinsically are poles apart.

"We had three mics on the amp for this album, something I'd not done before." He tells us. "We had a Neumann, a [Shure] SM57 and one of those big, old condenser mics, and they all sounded so different from each other. On certain songs Graham would suggest we blended them in one way and then on others we'd blend them in another way, and that's how we got the different tones. I'm very happy with the overall sound we got."

Interestingly, and contrary to our assumptions, Higham didn't use any effects during the recording of his parts; everything was added post-production.

"I don't have any delay or echo on while I'm playing to the track; I just find it gets in the way." He tells us. "I always get a bit picky about echo because sometimes when you've finished a song you might hear something you're not happy with, so you change it and, all of a sudden, that echoey guitar might not work. We did have that problem with *And The Angels Cried* because I'd recorded the >

> "I really wanted it to be very polished rather than an authentic-sounding rockabilly album – because I make those anyway!"

Darrel's White Falcon sports the same TV Jones T-Armond and T-90 pickups and fixed-arm Bigsby as his custom 5170

C'MON EVERYBODY

DARREL'S KEY ADVICE FOR GETTING INTO ROCKABILLY GUITAR

"The important part of rockabilly is getting the rhythm right. It's mainly done over a swing rhythm and that's what a lot of people struggle with initially. That takes a lot of practice as it's more natural to work with a blues shuffle, but swing is a specific thing and it does need to be worked on.

"You don't want to be playing over everybody else either, and when you're working in a three-piece the groove is very important. The guitar has to sit in with what the bass and drums are doing but, once you get the groove going, it really does work.

"I'd say listen to the originators, too, because you'll learn a great deal from Carl Perkins, Gene Vincent and Elvis records. Brian Setzer brought a lot of different influences into rockabilly music and, in doing so, really broadened the appeal. He's such a genius on the guitar that young people starting out will listen and will really want to be able to play like that, too. That's the great thing about rockabilly: there are a lot of interesting chords and solos that you can work into just about any type of music."

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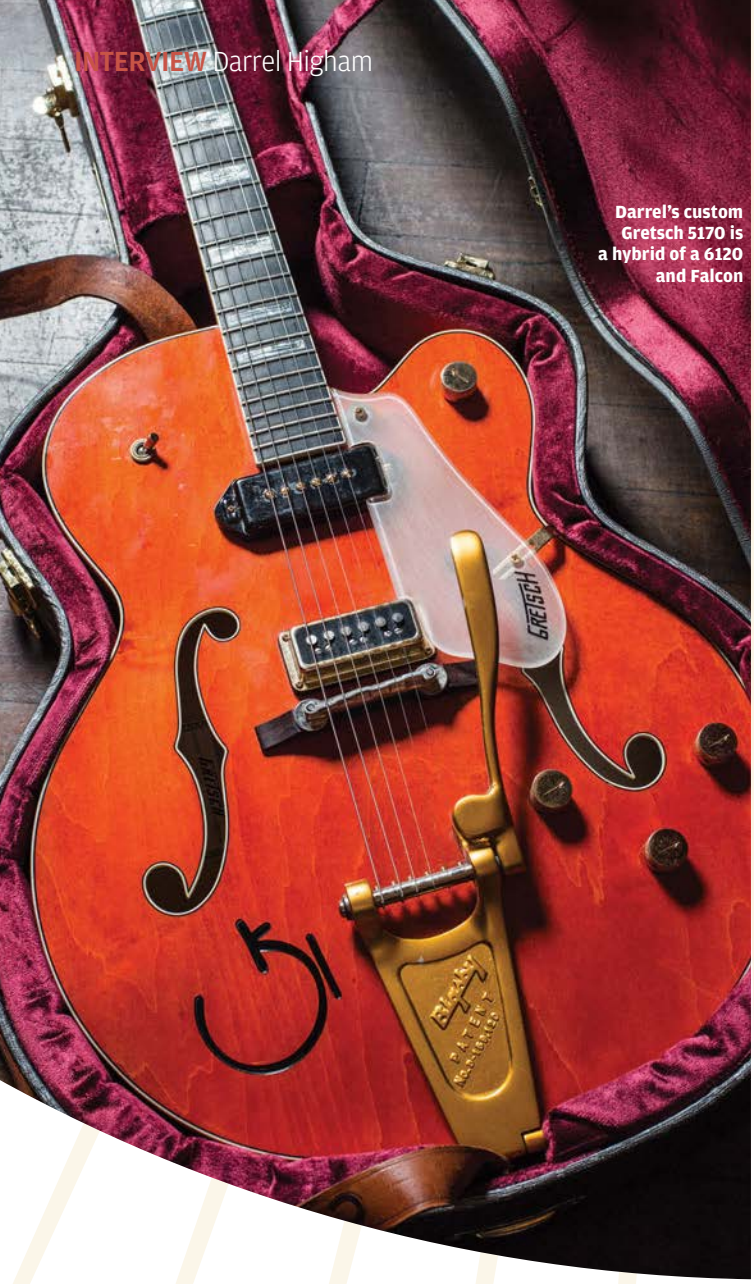

Darrel's custom Gretsch 5170 is a hybrid of a 6120 and Falcon

ORANGE CRUSH

A NEW PROJECT ALSO LED TO A NEW GUITAR. WELL, WHY NOT?

Darrel's main guitar for many years was a Custom Shop G6120 Nashville. However, as he explains, the reality of the road meant it was time for a rethink...

"A Custom Shop 6120 is made exactly how they were in the 50s, so they are very delicate." He begins. "I had to retire my 6120 because lacquer was peeling, but I wanted a bigger 6120 – because I prefer the size of a Falcon. So I asked (Gretsch Custom Shop Master Builder) Stephen Stern to make one for me and he did a great job."

"I call it the 5170 Falcon to give it a personalised touch [Higham's birthday is 5 January 1970] It's a Falcon-sized body with the same neck dimensions as a 6120, and a Falcon headstock. It feels like a tank in comparison to my 6120. One thing that helps immeasurably is to bolt the Bigsby into the body underneath the spring, and I've also had the bridge pinned. I use the Bigsby a lot and I rarely have tuning problems. It's got an aluminium nut too, which I prefer."

"It's got a centre block and, when Stephen asked me if I wanted one, it seemed like a good idea, only I'm not so sure now. I'm so used to the 6120; it really sings and resonates. I know a lot of people don't want that feedback on stage but I don't mind it too much so I might have the block taken out at some point."

> "I try and keep it simple, which is one of the things that I learned from Eddie Cochran – everything he did was very economical"

lead guitar with echo but, after I'd made a few changes, it no longer worked so I had to go in and do it again, dry."

Planting Seeds

As well as the original songs, it wouldn't be a proper rockabilly album without at least a couple of covers on it, and one of the ones Darrel choose for *Hell's Hotel* is the joyously bouncy *In Summer* – originally released in July 1963 by the great Billy Fury.

"I've been a huge fan for as long as I can remember." He explains. "Of course, he died in about 1983 [Fury died 28 January 1983, at the age of 42], so I never got a chance to see him live but I've always loved the *Sound Of Fury* album [released in 1960], which I consider to be the greatest British rockabilly album ever made. *In Summer* is so happy and upbeat, just a perfect pop song for that era. I listened to it again and imagined how Eddie Cochran might have done it and, once you get an idea, it becomes very easy.

"I actually played bass on that track and while I'm no bass player by any stretch, I can do the Cochran thing and once that strong bass thing was on there, everything fell into place." He expands. "I have this Fender copy in the studio, a horrible thing, and I think we put it through a Zoom bass pedal. I played it with a pick – you have to play it with a pick – and it has to be rigid and stay like that throughout the entire song; that's how you get that groove.

Another cover, Bill Allen's, *Please Give Me Something*, originally released in 1958, >

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Darrel Higham photographed at Bristol's Colston Hall, May 2017

BACK LINE MAN

DARREL ON THE TRUSTY BACKLINE THAT HAS STAYED WITH HIM THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER...

In contrast to his Custom Shop Gretsch guitar squeezes, Darrel has always favoured a fairly humble backline, but his Peavey Delta Blues combo has stayed the course for a very good reason.

"The Peavey's never let me down, really. It's been loyal to me and I'm loyal back," he explains. "It just does everything I want it to do; you plug it in and the sound is there. I've tried other amps, even other Peavey amps, and I've always struggled a bit. The combination of it being a small amp but with a 15-inch speaker is what makes it and it just seems to work really well with these particular pickups, the single-coils. It seems to bring out the best of them and I see no reason to change."

Equally unassuming is his effects choice. The Zoom G2 is about as entry-level a multi-effects unit as you can get, but it's followed him across the world.

"Again, I've always used Zooms," he shrugs. "They were always reasonably priced and always did a lot of things. I only use two sounds, mostly a very tight slapback with one repeat, or an ambient sound to thicken the sound, which is a very tight reverb. The main thing with the Zoom, something that I've always loved, is that you can press both pedals down to mute the guitar and tune up. That was a real revelation to me 20 years ago, and every time they bring out a new one I buy it, although I've stuck with the G2 because later ones had drum things in them!"

features a vocal from none other than Robert Plant – we're intrigued as to how that team-up came about...

"Robert got my number from Jeff Beck, I think. We got talking and he's a big fan of rockabilly, and we just kept in touch," Darrel explains. "When I knew that I was going to be recording a solo album, I thought it would be nice to have some guests appear on it, so I thought I'd just ask him, and if he'd have said no then that'd be fine. But he got back to me more or less straight away and then it was a matter of trying to find a song. *Please Give Me Something* is a rockabilly classic and I knew that it would suit him down to the ground. He knew the song, of course, and he came into Embassy, sang it twice and it was done. It was absolutely incredible."

Know Your Limiter

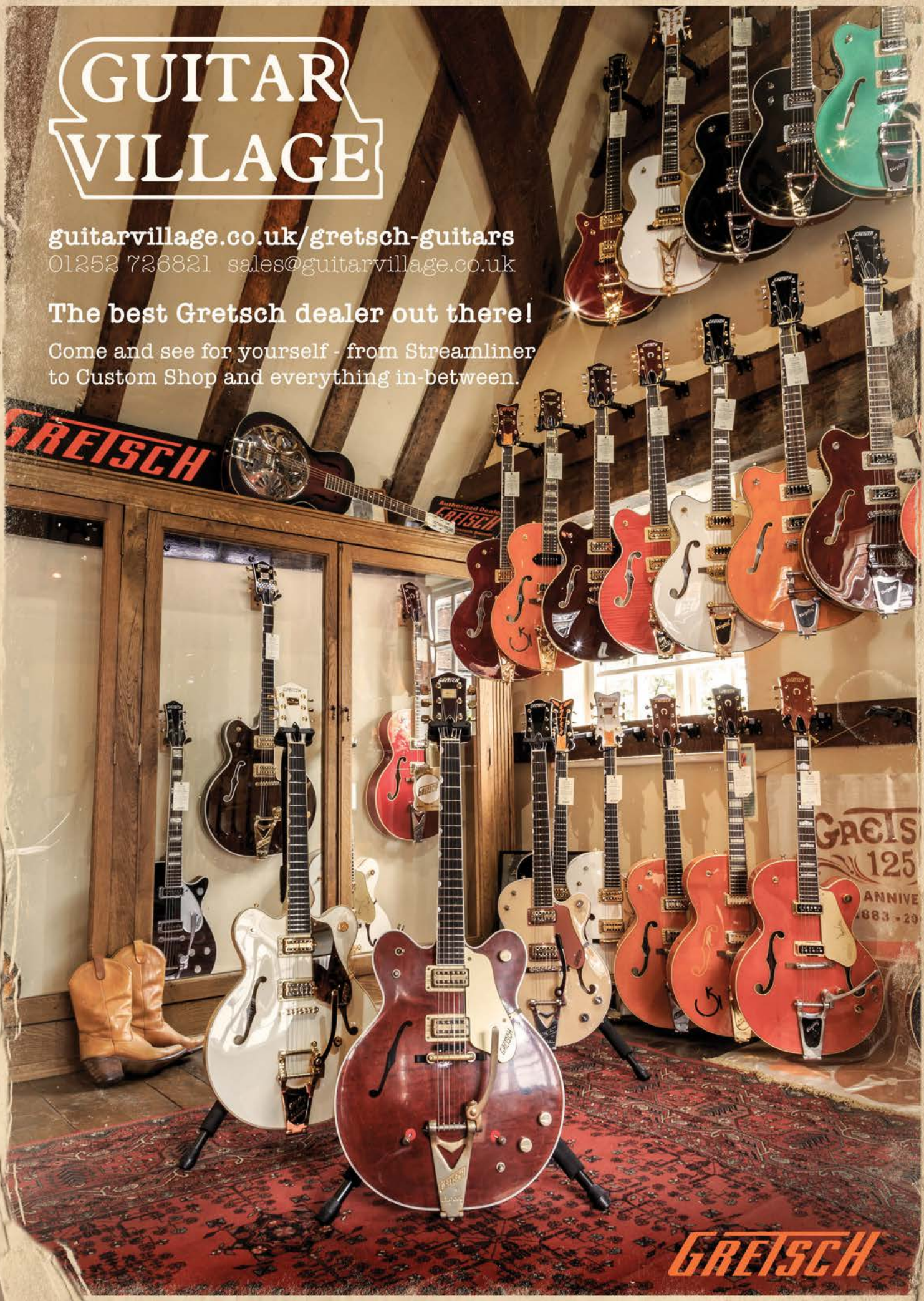
Working with an icon like Plant was a learning experience for Darrel and Graham – after all he's been at this game for quite some time, and he knows what he's doing.

"He walked into the vocal room and said to Graham: 'I want this particular echo, this compression,'" Higham says with a smile. "He knew the timings of the delays down to the millisecond and the exact settings of the compression he wanted. Now, Graham is usually a most unflappable and professional engineer – he's worked with everybody – but I remember watching his hand as he reached over to the dial on the compressor, and it shook just a little bit! And I thought that was wonderful!"

As our interview comes to an end, we ask for his general advice on performing live and how he gets the dynamics in there.

"I've always been able to alter the (guitar) sound, probably because I've been doing it so long, and when I sing I automatically play quieter. The DeArmonds really ping out the top strings so when you go into a solo they're naturally louder than the bass strings, which is really handy: it's almost like a built-in volume control.

"As a rule I try and keep it as simple as I can, which is one of the things that I learned from listening to Eddie Cochran records. Everything he did was very economical, but it's the song that's the most important thing; that's what has to connect with an audience. I like to keep things as simple as I can and I just want it to be a really entertaining rock 'n' roll show."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Lone Wolf BLUES

With her trusty, if minimal, guitar collection at her side and the seal of approval from Joe Bonamassa and Glenn Hughes, Joanne Shaw Taylor tells **THEA DE GALLIER** how she's forging ahead on her own terms. Just don't call her Joss Stone...

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

The last time *The Guitar Magazine* caught up with Joanne Shaw Taylor, she'd just released her fourth album, *The Dirty Truth*, and was openly elated to have reached the stage of knowing her own strengths and playing to them. "I've got to the point where I write songs that suit my guitar playing and also my voice," she told us, and called the album a "nice tie-up" of her previous ones. That was back in 2014, and anyone with even a vague knowledge of Taylor's relentless writing and touring schedule will know that feeling comfortable is no excuse to rest on her laurels.

Her fifth album, *Wild*, was released in October last year, and she began touring it almost immediately, before joining Joe Bonamassa on the Keeping The Blues Alive At Sea cruise in February. "It was chaos, and wonderful, and all the things you can expect from living on a boat with a bunch of blues musicians for five days," laughs Taylor, 32. "The closest thing we get in the UK is a weekend at Butlins! It's amazing, you're [playing] on a huge pool deck cruising through the ocean."

> "He said, 'You know, you're really good for a girl'. I was like, 'Thanks, because these ovaries really prevent me doing stuff in life!'"

Bonamassa has been a long-time champion of Taylor's, bringing her on his first blues cruise two years ago, and having her support him on his British Blues UK tour last year. "Joe's pretty much been my best friend since I met him around 10 years ago," she says of the American guitar phenom. "We have a lot in common; we both grew up as the chubby blonde blues guitarist kids. He used to be in a band called Bloodline that I was a huge fan of when I was a kid working in a guitar shop, and one of the guys gave me their CD. We've both got a very dry sense of humour; we're very miserable people!"

Breaking Out Of Boxes

Listening to Taylor chatting easily away in her husky tones, and often breaking into a chuckle, it's hard to imagine that she really is the cynic she claims to be. But, as the subject inevitably turns to being a woman in a male-dominated music scene, it's clear her ability to take things with a large pinch of salt have helped her brush off some boneheaded sexism. "It's still there," she says. "Someone came up to me on the boat – it was a man – and he said, 'You know, you're really good for a girl'. I was like, 'Thanks, because these >

ovaries really prevent me doing stuff in life!' I don't check out much stuff online, but my dad does, and he gets really wound up. Maybe it's the pessimist, glass-half-empty in me, but I just stopped caring."

It was partly her exasperation at being put in boxes with other female artists because of her gender as opposed to her musical output that led her to start her own label, Axehouse Records. "One I got the other day was, 'If you like Joanne, you should check out Lzzy Hale!'" she says, sounding both amused and exasperated. "It was always my ambition from the get-go to be independent," she explains. "I was signed to Dave Stewart's record label [the former Eurythmic discovered her when she was 16] and after that collapsed, Dave helped me get in front of some major labels. One wanted me to be like the Norah Jones of blues, and another wanted me to be the Avril Lavigne of blues. I know I'm a novelty act; I was a 19-year-old girl playing blues guitar, and it doesn't take much for an A&R guy to think that's sellable. But it detracted from what I wanted to do, which is being a serious musician, and I think me being independent is a way of controlling that. I'm not very good at not being myself. A few photoshoots have put me in way too much makeup and done my hair, and I look like a pissed-off toddler!"

Our House

To that end, Taylor chose to sign with German indie label Ruf Records, which she used to "run that contract out and build a fan base until I could start [a label] myself". *The Dirty Truth* and *Wild* were released through Axehouse, and Taylor says she wouldn't rule out expanding her operation and signing other artists – just not for a while. "I think the label is just for me; I'm still pretty busy touring, and there are still a lot of albums I want to do," she muses. "But if that slows down over the next decade or two I'd be interested in taking on some other artists, particularly younger ones, because I think with my experience I could help save people from the pitfalls [of major labels] and have some advice to give." She laughs that throaty chuckle when I ask if she'd like to be seen as a role model for young female guitarists wanting to follow in her footsteps. "That sounds like a lot of responsibility! But yes, it would be nice to think I could encourage some girls. I've started to see it happen which is really nice, I've seen more girls coming forward and dads bringing their daughters. I try and make an effort to spend a bit of time with them because I remember when I was that age, the difference it made to me meeting bands and people I was into."

In Therapy

For now, Taylor is concentrating on her upcoming tour dates, and beginning to write her sixth album. "We're probably going to >

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record at the end of this year and release something in 2018," she says. "We've got some big summer festivals this year [Ramblin' Man and the Cottingham Folk Festival] and a big European run." When it comes to writing the record, Taylor says she'll take the same personal approach that defined *Wild*, whose opening song, *Dyin' To Know*, delved into the subject of addiction. "I don't really know any other way of writing, to be honest," she explains. "This is my therapy. It goes back to the old blues guys; that's why they did it, because their lives were so hard they expressed themselves through the art form. There'll be some fictional songs on the new album, but there'll also be some songs about people I'm still pissed off with, or who are pissed off with me."

> "This is my therapy. It goes back to the old blues guys; their lives were so hard they expressed themselves through the art form"

Just Say No

Case in point, while *Dyin' To Know* isn't about a specific individual, it takes aim at the music industry's hard-partying culture, which has never appealed to her. "I think it attracts a lot of addictive personalities," she says. "I've been fortunate to stay away from it; I'm relatively healthy. I work out and enjoy a drink but I'm always busy and focused and I don't have that personality, fortunately. One thing I've always hated about this industry is that it's almost encouraged to drink. If I had a nine-to-five job in a bank I wouldn't start drinking at midday! But it's kind of accepted. Over the past couple of years, I went through a spate of running into people who'd taken advantage of that and become their own worst enemies. Friendships fall by the wayside; if you've got that addictive personality you can't see the negatives of what you're doing. I had to axe a couple of characters out of my life for their sake and mine. *Dyin' To Know* was about that."

Drugs were around, Taylor says, even when she was playing shows as a 15-year-old. "It >

The Blues Effect

How Joanne Shaw Taylor creates her electric blues sound, live and in the studio...

ON RECORD

"I don't use any effects in the studio – Kevin [Shirley] wouldn't let me! He thinks a guitar into an amp sounds good enough when cranked up. We had a lot of different amps; old Fenders and Marshall heads and just went direct."

ON STAGE

"Pedals are my comfort blanket on stage. I've got a basic overdrive, an Ibanez Tube Screamer, and a Mojo Hand delay pedal."

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terrified me," she admits, before adding that she thinks the clean living trend has gone some way towards changing perceptions of what constitutes 'cool' behaviour. "It's cooler to be gluten free and go to hot yoga every Tuesday than it is to do cocaine," she laughs. "Vegan seems to be the new thing." But that doesn't mean Taylor is about to start Instagramming a constant stream of quinoa and green juices – in fact, she'd rather stay off social media as much as possible. It's obvious even in the 45 minutes we spend talking to her that fame was never one of her goals; if anything, it's a vaguely annoying by-product of what she does.

"I miss that mystery of when I was growing up and I didn't know anything about Stevie Ray Vaughan or Hendrix unless I bought a book off Amazon that took six weeks to get to me," she says. "Now I can go on Instagram and see what musicians had for breakfast or where they're going for their anniversary. It's too much for me. My manager makes me do social media, but I'm sceptical that when you start putting yourself out there, you'll open yourself up to more criticism. I'm quite a private person."

Old Soul

Even as a kid, Taylor was an old soul, listening to ZZ Top, Free and Slade instead of whatever dominated the charts at the time. It's her lack of preoccupation with being perceived as cool that has allowed her to succeed on the merit of her talent alone, and also what drew her to America's bluesy heartland. For the past 10 years, she's split her time between the UK and Detroit, and recorded *Wild* in Nashville with rock producer extraordinaire Kevin Shirley, whose credits include Journey, Iron Maiden, Rush, Led Zeppelin, and her good friend Bonamassa.

The US blues scene, she says, is still very much focused on the traditional. "I'm not sure they're keen on the new wave of guitar solos," she chuckles. "Hence Joe and the like will probably find more of an audience in Europe than the States. [I've had times at US blues festivals] where I thought, 'maybe we should have added a harmonica?' I think most people over here are just surprised to hear a girl with an English accent singing the blues; I get 'are you related to Joss Stone?'"

Her US tour last year with momentary Sabbath frontman and ex-Deep Purple bassist Glenn Hughes was, she says, the first time she's been able to up her rock ante with an American crowd. "It was nice to be able to rock the set up a bit and not be too traditional for the Deep Purple fans," she says. One thing that didn't join her on that tour, though, was her beloved 1966 Fender Esquire. "That's the first proper guitar I ever got, but one of the airlines damaged it on a flight from Detroit to London once, so I tend to just use it in Europe," she explains. "I found it on Denmark Street, and I got it pretty cheap because the previous owner had attacked it with a knife. I think they were trying to put a humbucker in the neck or something, maybe they were drunk! But it's been my main guitar for years now."

"I got my 1966 Esquire pretty cheap because the previous owner had attacked it with a knife... maybe they were drunk!"

Keep It Simple

Taylor admits she likes to keep things "pretty basic" gear-wise. "I've got two Fender Super Reverb amps and the little Marshall Bluesbreakers for some of the rockier, heavier stuff. I've got my Albert Collins Signature Telecaster, and a couple of stock Les Pauls. They're pretty new to me, and I've just bought a new 2008 custom model with James Hetfield's signature pickups. That'll annoy the blues fans! Really, I'm not a gearhead at all. On the boat, Joe was talking to a guy called Norm who owns Norman's Rare Guitars and they were getting into different coatings on necks and all sorts. I'm not that much of a gear nerd, I'm afraid."

Some guitarists would think it blasphemy to admit to being rather ambivalent to gear, but that's unlikely to bother Taylor. She's got as far as she has without being anything other than herself – gear ambivalence and all – and that's the way she plans to continue. "I know who I am, and I know who I'm not," she says, proudly and decisively. "I live by those rules."

© Getty Images

Paul Gilbert

THE FIVE PIECES OF GEAR I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Paul Gilbert is one of the most respected and exciting guitar virtuosos around, but even the greats need to have their gear set-up just right to really wail. Here he tells **JOE BOSSO** about the kit that he simply has to have to perform at his best...

Paul Gilbert's love of gear started with one word: distortion. As a budding teenaged axeman, he fixated on buying either a DiMarzio Super Distortion pickup or an MXR Distortion Plus pedal, simply because they both sported that magical word. "I had never tried them, but they both said 'distortion,' so I figured they must do the same thing," he says.

Gilbert wound up purchasing a used DiMarzio pickup, and after his dad installed it in his guitar, he took it out for a spin. The results were... interesting. "I definitely noticed a higher output, but I was surprised that it didn't make my guitar 100 per cent fuzzy all the time like a effects pedal would," he says. "In retrospect, it was a good thing."

Since those early days, Gilbert has tried – and owned – just about every known piece of gear there is. "I used to be a hoarder," he says, "But then I ran out of room. I have a lot of fun with tweaking with my guitars, pedals and amps, but I like to keep things relatively simple. I want to be inspired by my gear, not distracted. I'd just rather spend more time playing than tweaking." It's a stripped back approach, then, but even so, there are some things that he can't live without... >

Gilbert uses a much thinner pick than many other speedy players

© Getty Images

Foam Earplugs

"They're simple, cheap, and they work. I order boxes of them in bulk. Over the years, I've tried three different sets of expensive, custom-fit in-ear monitors. Many artists love them, but I've always had problems with in-ears. For one thing, they're difficult to get in and take out. Also, the minute I sweat from the stage lights, they start shifting around and losing their airtight seal. And then there's the cable, which always seems to get tangled in my shirt or guitar strap.

"For a while I tried using headphones, but I'd wind up cranking them, which defeats the purpose of the isolation they provide. These days, I just stuff some yellow foam earplugs in my ears. I put some snare and kick in my monitor so I can feel the drums. I tell the drummer that I won't be able to hear his hi-hat or ride cymbals, so during any sections where only those are happening, he'll have to follow my guitar. And this works great, so thank you, drummers!

"I can't always hear my guitar as well as I'd like to, so that means that I need to learn the fretboard better so that I know what a note will sound like before I play it – rather than just hitting a note I'm unsure of and then making a quick adjustment up or down. Because of this, I've actually become much better at seeing roots and chord tones all over the fretboard in many keys, and I've become a better overall improviser."

Ibanez Fireman

"I really do love this guitar. It began its life as an Iceman that I turned upside down in Photoshop. I didn't have any idea how it would turn out in real life, but it became a design that I love in every way.

"It resonates beautifully, its balance is great whether I'm sitting or standing, and most importantly, it looks like an electric brontosaurus. It has a shorter scale than an Ibanez PGM or RG, and that allows my fingers to stretch further and do bends easier. It's got a neck that just exudes tone." >

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Calluses

"I know this isn't 'gear', but it's of supreme importance to me. If I start a tour with soft fingertips, I'll compensate by using lighter strings until my calluses get in shape. On one tour, I did a couple shows where I threw away the sixth string and moved each string up one slot. So, my set ended up being 0.032, 0.024, 0.016, 0.011, 0.009 and 0.008 – the 0.008 was an old spare. This wasn't great for keeping chords in tune, but I was mostly doing solos anyway. More importantly, I could still bend wildly and without any fear. After a few days of this, I had calluses thick enough that I could get back to my normal set of Ernie Balls – 0.009 through 0.042."

TC Electronic MojoMojo

"There's no other way to say it: This simple overdrive pedal just sounds good. Because I do a lot of shows where Marshall amps are provided for me, I have to make certain adjustments to get the kind of sound I want. I've found that I can get the most consistent sound at these shows by setting the amp as clean as possible and relying on the MojoMojo for my distortion.

"I just did a new Mr Big album with our original producer, Kevin Elson, and I brought a whole collection of overdrive pedals to the studio. Kevin's favourite was the MojoMojo. I have a secret setting: I keep the bass knob somewhere between 2 o'clock and all the way up. I guess it's not a secret anymore!"

Dunlop Tortex 'The Wedge' 0.50mm picks

"When I give these to people, they refuse to believe I use them. I guess that's because so much of the shred guitar world is comprised of players who use thick picks – and they use small, careful, dainty motions.

"I might be saddled with the shredder label, but that's not the way I play. I'm not one of those guys who stares blankly at his fingers and doesn't move his body. And I know a lot more songs by the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, the MC5, Iggy And The Stooges, Ted Nugent and The Who, than I do instrumental songs.

"A big thin pick allows me to hit the guitar hard. And let me tell you, the pick scratches are glorious. Do not underestimate the power of a good pick scratch – listen to Ted Nugent's solo on *Stranglehold* and the very first sound Eddie Van Halen makes in *Eruption*.

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Gilbert's Fireman started life as a Photoshop experiment

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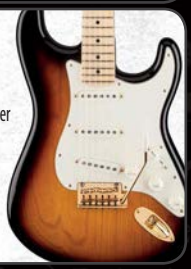

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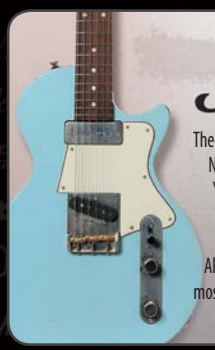

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DIY WORKSHOP

JAZZMASTER BRIDGE & WIRING UPGRADES

Most Jazzmaster lovers will concede that the classic Fender offset's stock bridge is something of a bête noire when used with modern strings. **HUW PRICE** tackles the installation of a Mastery unit and shows you how to wire up your controls and keep hum to a minimum...

1 Mastery's bridge design features swivelling low friction saddles, global height adjustment, radius setting and a cutaway back plate for clear string path

2 For shielding Allparts UK supplied a Fender aluminium plate and adhesive backed copper foil

3 Transfer the cavity shape onto the foil by pressing the edges with your finger then cut them out with scissors

4 After cutting out the foil to line the bases of all the cavities, we set them to one side

Jazzmasters are nothing if not eccentric beasts, and that presents certain unique challenges if you want to mod, repair or restore one of your own. The most common worry for those of us tackling Jazzmaster restorations and repairs is the bridge, but it doesn't have to be. Don't worry if you have no interest in Jazzmasters and their potentially troublesome hardware, either – you'll find this advice applicable to Jaguars and Bigsby-equipped Teles, too.

The other issue that often plagues Jazzmasters, and single-coil guitars in general, is hum – so we're also going to look at how to shield your internals to keep the noise down, and also how to wire up the controls themselves.

Mastering The Bridge

In 1958, Fender began using threaded saddles on some of their guitars – Telecasters got them, along with the new Jazzmaster model. The idea behind this was that the multi-grooved design would allow players to set their own string spacing – and with a nice steep break angle over the saddle they work well enough. However, the Jazzmaster's break angle is slightly too shallow, and the grooves on the saddles are not deep enough to prevent strings from jumping out.

This wouldn't have been an issue for jazz players with heavy flatwound strings, which as the name suggests were the target audience for the Jazzmaster. However, it never really caught on with jazzers, and the surfers, garage-rockers and noiseniks who took the instrument to heart have generally had to retro-fit a Mustang bridge as a drop-in replacement. It's not a perfect one – Jazzmaster and Mustang bridges are known to rattle, and if you don't get your neck angle right, the strings can buzz against the rear plate of the bridge.

Another well-documented issue involves the action height adjustment screws. Jazzmaster bridges are attached to posts with grub screws at the bottom. The posts are inserted into cups or 'thimbles' that are pressed into the body and a long Allen key can be directed through the centre of the post to set the bridge height at each end.

In practice the grub screws can be too loose and prolonged vibration and whammy bar action can cause them to retract within the posts. As a consequence, the action becomes lower and strings will begin choking out and even stop ringing altogether.

A popular modern solution is the Mastery Bridge. Designed by luthier John Woodland, this high-end unit is made in Minneapolis and has garnered a stellar reputation with such Jazzmaster heavyweights as Nels Cline, Thurston Moore and Elvis Costello. Bill Frisell uses a Mastery bridge with a Bigsby on a JW Black T-style. Curiously, J Mascis prefers a tune-o-matic.

Bridge Fit

The Mastery unit looks more like a piece of contemporary sculpture than a regular bridge, and it purports to solve every Jazzmaster problem. The bridge features two saddles, each with two pivot points allowing both trios of strings to be intonated accurately. In addition, saddle heights can be set at each end to conform to various fingerboard radiuses. With our guitar's 9.5-inch radius neck, a 7.25-inch Mustang bridge was never going to be a workable solution without under-saddle shims.

Although you can drop a Mastery bridge into the factory thimbles, you can also use Mastery's thimbles instead. The Mastery posts and thimbles are made to such fine tolerances that when you press a post into a thimble, it forms a vacuum. Unlike a regular Jazzmaster bridge, which is designed to rock back and forth with the vibrato, Mastery bridges are fixed in place.

Many Jazzmaster players regard the stock bridge as a cause of tuning instability because it doesn't always return to position correctly. I decided to install the Mastery thimbles here, however it's worth noting that Mastery bridge posts do not fit Japanese-made thimbles as tightly. If this is the case with your guitar, you may decide to change the thimbles as well as the bridge. Check the thimbles on the instrument you are upgrading to see what fits best.

The Mastery thimbles also differ in size from Japanese thimbles. The Mastery dimensions are 9.3mm wide and 2.05mm long compared to 8.545mm and 1.95mm. So if you do decide to swap out the thimbles on a Japanese-made Jazzmaster, some re-drilling may be required. I covered the process of installing bridge thimbles in our November 2015 Telecaster revamp feature.

Once I have the thimbles installed, I adjust the post grub screws to extend beyond the posts to ensure they contact the base of the thimbles. The grub screws are also fairly tight, although they do move freely enough for adjustments. Before dropping the bridge in, I very slightly slacken the screws connecting the posts to the bridge base because the Mastery allows you some leeway to compensate for thimble spacing discrepancies.

The posts went straight into the thimbles, so I re-tightened the base screws and then retracted the post grub screws to lower the bridge height. It was immediately apparent that the neck would need a shim, but the factory saddle settings provided a good starting point for intonation and the acoustic tone displayed superb clarity and sustain.

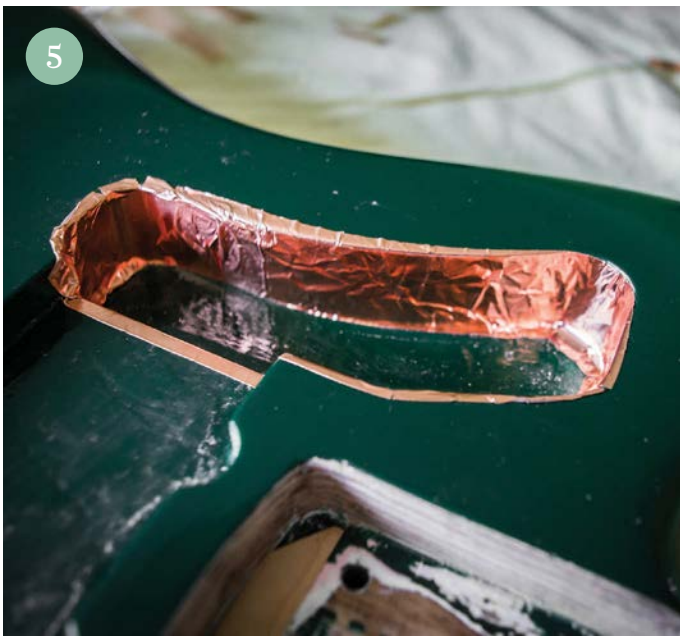
Raise The Shields

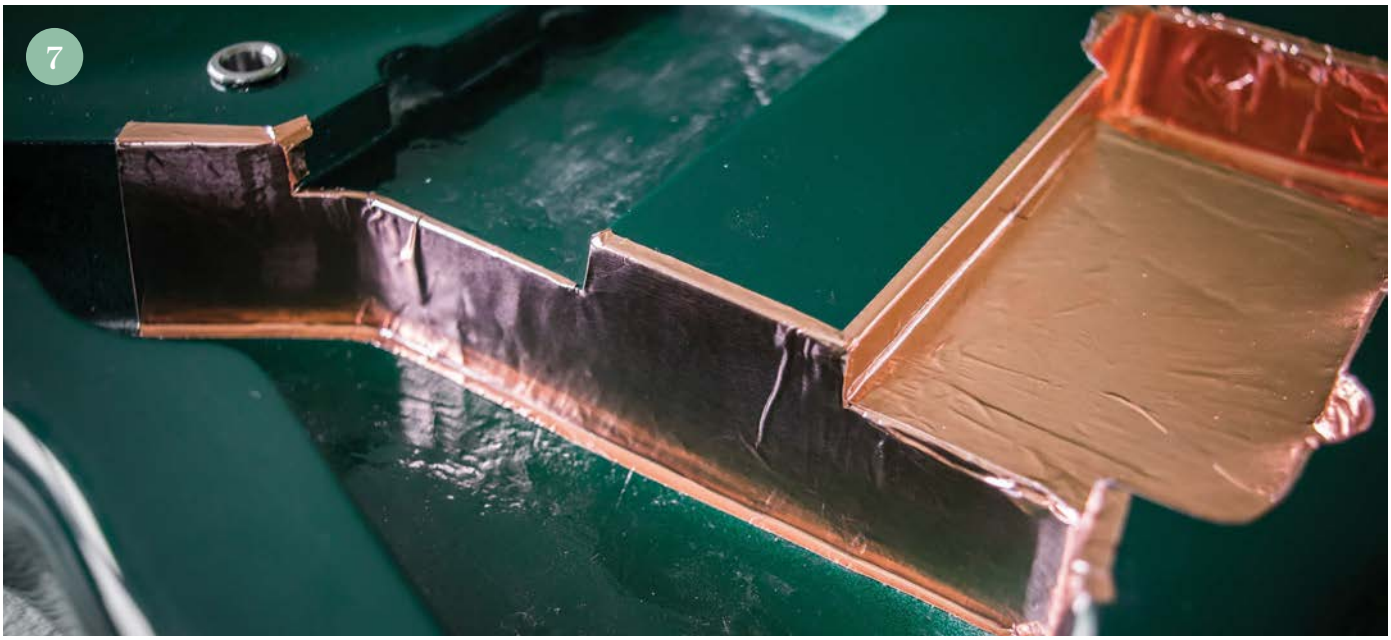
Whether each of the instruments Leo Fender introduced was an improvement on previous models is a matter of debate, however there's no denying each one represented an evolutionary stage in Fender's approach to guitar design. The outward differences between the Strat and the Jazzmaster are obvious, but one of Jazzmaster's groundbreaking features hides under the cover.

Gibson and Gretsch introduced humbucking pickups in 1957, so Fender must have been considering how to reduce noise without deviating from single-coil pickups. He went down the shielding route and lined the control cavities with form fitting brass. The first Jazzmaster pickguard was aluminium, which also provided shielding, so when Fender changed to a celluloid nitrate guard, he placed a thinner aluminium shield under the pickguard.

Fortunately, you can buy a Fender-branded repro of the aluminium shield, but full cavity shields are impossible to come by. Instead I decide to use sticky backed copper foil to line the body cavities and found the foil and a shield at allparts.uk.com.

The process of lining the cavities begins with laying the foil over the cavities – with the backing still on the foil – and pressing around the edges of the routs to transfer the shapes onto the foil. This provides a crisp outline and you can cut out the shapes with a sharp scissors. With foil cutouts made for the bases of the control cavity routs and both pickups, I set them aside while applying foil to the sides of the routs. >





5 Foil is applied to the sides then lipped over the top and bottom edges

6 After the sides are done you can lay in the base and the second circuit rout is now completed

7 Next we're moving on to shielding the main control cavity

8 Protect the paintwork from stray blobs of solder with kitchen paper

9 Solder joints ensure electrical continuity across the screening

10 The shield is aligned with the scratchplate and held in position with the switch and jack socket

11 Load hardware with pots facing down to ensure it all fits in the cavities

12 The Allparts Jazzmaster wiring kit provides everything you need for this fairly complex wiring job

I try to leave a slight overlap at the top and bottom so the foil will contact the aluminium shield and make up for any inaccuracies in the base cut outs. Some of the shapes were tricky and I found it easiest to work with shorter strips of foil rather than attempt to complete each area with a single strip. Once the sides are done I lay in the bases and patch up a couple of areas where I can see green paint.

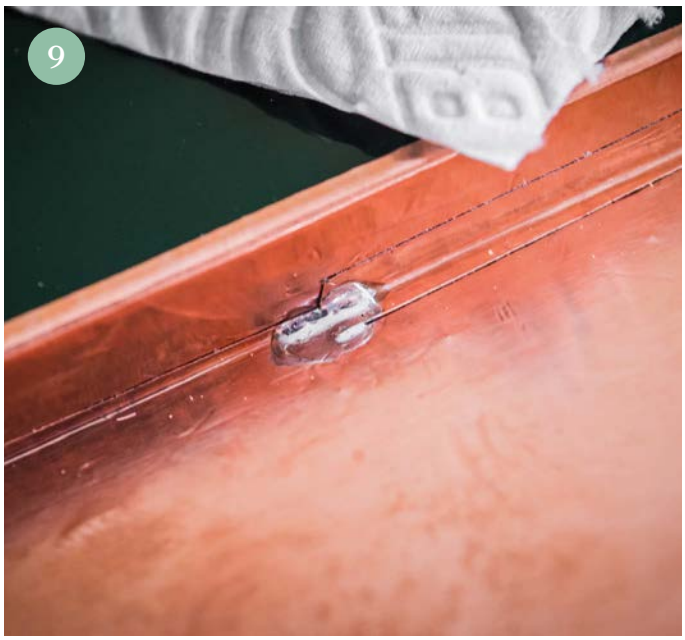
It's important for there to be electrical connectivity across every section of foil. Wherever I had used multiple strip or added patches, I applied blobs of solder to the joins between the various pieces. I also applied solder to the joins between the foil on the sides and bottoms of the cavities. A multimeter set on 'continuity' was used to check that the shield was properly connected up and then it was time to move onto assembling the pickguard.

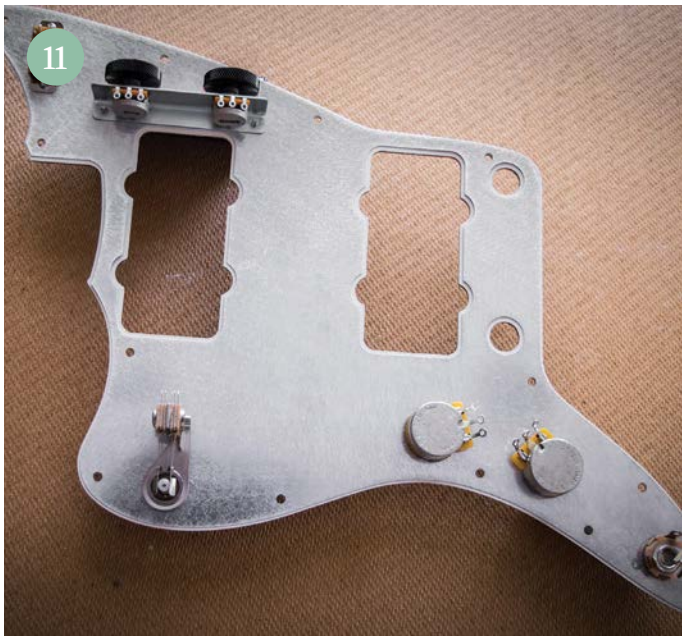
Packing The Pickguard

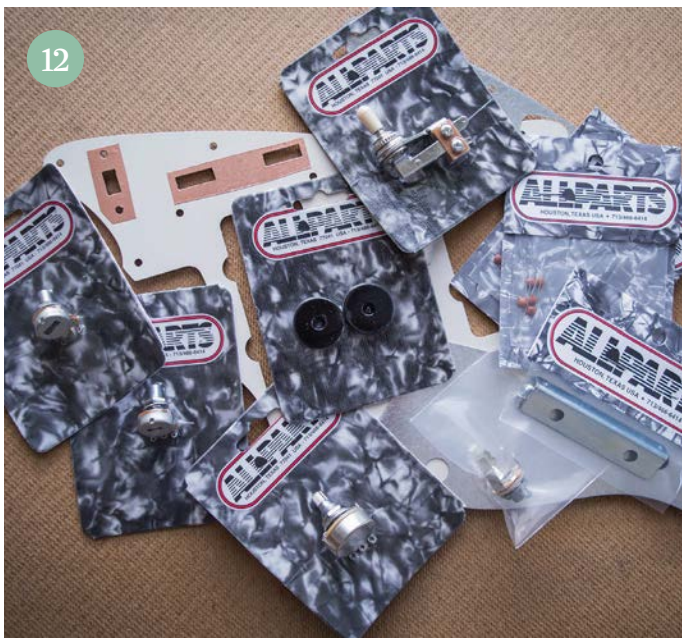
I perform a test fit with the shield and the pickguard to establish that everything lines up really well. However there are some oversized holes around the tone circuit switch and controls, so I add some copper foil patches and cut out the holes using a craft knife.

The shield isn't glued to the guard and instead, the potentiometers and switches clamp it in position. I loosely fit the circuit switch and the output jack, line up all the screw holes then tighten up the screws and nut to hold the shield in place before loading up the pots and pickup selector switch.

The second circuit volume and tone pots are mounted on an 'L' plate so they're at 90 degrees to the pickguard. They're solid shaft 16mm pots rather than the full-sized 22mm split shaft pots and Allparts UK provided the roller wheels, as well as the pots. Each pot comes with a washer and



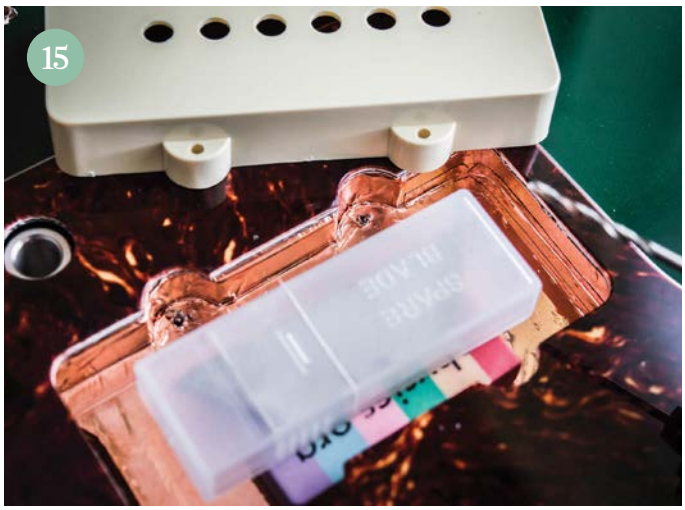




a nut and I find it necessary to install the washers behind the 'L' bracket in order to centralise the roller wheels in their slots.

You also have to mount the pots onto the bracket and loosely fit the rollers before screwing the bracket onto the pickguard. Once it's fixed, you can fine-tune the position of the rollers on the pot shafts and tighten the grub screws to fix the wheels in position. Also note that the main volume and tone pots have to be twisted away from the edges to fit because there's not much wriggle room in the control cavities.

I ploughed through a bunch of different Jazzmaster wiring diagrams online until I found one I trusted at Rothstein Guitars (www.guitar-mod.com). Most of those I found seemed to show alternative wiring schemes, so be careful. It's also interesting to discover that the Jazzmaster circuit has a 1meg linear pot for volume and a 1meg audio pot for tone. To wire a Jazzmaster, you need to assemble quite a collection of parts. Allparts UK sells a complete Jazzmaster wiring kit, which comes with helpful diagrams. However take care when unwrapping the components, because the shrink-wrap is hard to remove and you may damage delicate switch >



13 The pickup selector switch's solder tags must be splayed before you start soldering to prevent shorting out

14 The first stage of the wiring is complete – don't forget to insulate the legs of the tone capacitors

15 We shim up the pickup covers so they're aligned with the pickguard cutouts then drill pilot holes for the cover screws

16 With the wiring finally completed, the wires are held in place using nylon cable ties

17 The solder tags connect the bridge ground wire to the shield and the shield to the negative terminal of the output jack

and pot solder tags if you're not careful and patient.

In Suspense

Hooking up begins with grounding the volume pot tag and splaying the solder tags on the pickup selector. While referring to a schematic and photos of Jazzmaster wiring, I connect up the main control pots and the three-way switch.

The fiddliest part is connecting up the pots and switch on the second circuit then running all the longer wires between the two circuits. I use strips of masking tape to hold all the wires neatly in place as I work my way through the installation.

You may have noticed that the pickups still haven't been installed. Unlike Stratocasters, where the pickups are suspended from a pickguard assembly, which can be lifted out in its entirety, Jazzmaster pickups are screwed directly onto the body. To position the pickups properly, I first fit the loaded pickguard onto the body and screw it down.

The pickup covers are then placed into the cutouts with spacers underneath so the sides line up properly with the closely cut pickguard openings, and I drill pilot holes for the cover screws using the screw holes in the covers to guide the drill bit.

Applying masking tape to the top of the covers, I position them inside the pickup openings with the tape holding them in place. The pickguard is then flipped and the pickups dropped into their covers then soldered into the circuit. Once that's done I do a visual check and test the switches using a multimeter – everything's good, so I replaced the masking tape with nylon cable ties.

The shielding has to be grounded, so I attach a couple of solder tags to the side of the control cavity with a self-tapping screw. The tags are used for the ground wires connected to the bridge and the output jack. Before screwing the pickguard back down and stringing up, I verified the controls were working properly and was relieved to find I'd done it right first time.

If it's your first time working on a Jazzmaster, you'll notice that it's much more complicated than most other Fender solidbodies. It's worth the perspiration though, as a few well-chosen upgrades can make all the difference. Happily, the Mastery bridge is everything it's cracked up to be. First impressions of the Mojo 58-64 pickups I used are also highly encouraging – visit www.mojopickups.co.uk to check out the full range.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw returns to his now-stripped single-cut to continue his quest to turn it into a P-90-toting Goldtop

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TECH SUPPORT

Andrew Pih spent years on the road as guitar tech for Jazzmaster-toting high priest of shoegaze, Kevin Shields. Here, he shares some words of advice that'll help you keep your Jaguar or Jazzmaster in the finest of fettle...

Story: Huw Price

Andrew Pih is the man behind Motion Custom Works amps, but earlier in his career he was the long-serving guitar tech to My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields. Like his former boss, Pih is a confirmed offset-addict, having owned more than 50 over the years. He still retains a small collection of choice vintage examples. Read on as this staunch defender of the stock Jazzmaster bridge shares his wisdom...

Opposite: Andrew tech'd for My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields, and now runs Motion Custom Works amplifiers, which can be found at motioncustom.co.uk

So, let's start with that much maligned bugbear, the bridge... how do you get it to behave?

"That's the thing that everybody talks about, and admittedly they're not the most stable things in the world, but depending on what you're doing they can be quite workable. With a set of 0.012s or 0.013s they're just fine. The grub screws tend to unwind in the saddles, so the action moves about. If you jack the saddles up it increases the pressure on the screws, which makes them less susceptible to unwinding. So don't rely just on the grub screws inside the thimbles to set the action.

"If the bridge is high, the saddles will be low and the grub screws in the saddles will be too vertical. If you lower the bridge and raise the saddles, it puts the grub screws at an angle and gives them something to lock against, so they're less likely to unwind."

Wouldn't it be simpler just to change the bridge?

"A lot of people do that, and there are better options available, but I like the standard bridge. As I said, heavier strings help, but you won't be doing J Mascis or Sonic Youth impressions with those on your guitar. But if you play surf stuff with 0.013s like a geezer, you're alright. The modern thing is to change over to a Mastery, but I'm not a fan. I don't like the string spacing because I have big hands and the Mastery takes the high E about 3mm inside the edge of the fingerboard and makes the guitar feel more like a Rickenbacker [some players prefer the Mastery string spacing, as the E strings are further away from the fretboard edges – discuss! Ed].

"Also, when you play a Jazzmaster or Jaguar unplugged, you'll notice you get a resonance behind the bridge and it's quite pleasant. You lose that with a Mastery, along with some looseness and openness in the way the guitar feels. Also the Mastery doesn't move with the vibrato as Leo originally intended, and I think that detracts.

"My main guitar is a late-50s or possibly very early 60s slab board. That one has a Mustang bridge, and the originals are really nice because there were no gaps between the saddles so they couldn't move side to side.

"It's an interference fit, unlike the modern Mustang bridges that have a 3/4mm gap between the saddles. You lose some resonance because the saddles are almost free floating and you lose some attack. Jazzmasters don't have much attack because of the string length, but you lose even more of it with the reissue Mustang bridges."

And you have no control over the string radius either...

"That's right, because they're matched to a 7.25-inch radius. Normally you'd want to lift the top E and B strings a bit to get over the radius, so you end up having to lift all the strings more and your D and G end up being higher than you might want them to be.

"There are people making Mustang saddles with height adjustment screws, but that puts you back in the same position as the Jazzmaster and Jaguar bridge with the screws moving. Another reason for using Mustang saddles is to stop the strings popping out of their slots, but it can still happen. If that's the case I'd suggest changing your playing technique because you're too heavy handed.

"I play pretty hard and I don't have that problem, but I'm used to these guitars. If you're changing from a Les Paul or Tele, however, you need to realise these are very different instruments. Another option is the Staytrem bridge. It's like a Mustang bridge but the saddles have deeper grooves and they've done away with the springs so there's no rattle. You can order 7.25-inch or 9-inch radius, too."

> "I play pretty hard, but I'm used to these guitars. If you're changing from a Les Paul or Tele, you need to realise these are very different instruments"

Are there any tricks for getting the vibrato to operate smoothly?

"I like a fairly loose tremolo and being able to pull up as well as push down on it. The springs can lose their elasticity depending on how they've been used. Sometimes people who don't like the feel tighten the system up massively, which crushes the spring. Because it's spring steel, the metal has 'memory'. It loses some springiness and you can get tuning issues from that.

"I usually start with the end of the screw flush with the bottom of the collet and maybe tighten it a bit from there so you can use the trem lock. If a trem has been used a lot the pivot plate digs into the anchor plate and you can get clicks, pings and clangs.

"Sometimes it needs careful filing to round the edge off to get rid of that and I may put graphite powder around the anchor plate, too. It finds its way to where it needs to be and it's usually good for a few months. It's called Kasp and you can get it online or from good hardware stores. Fender's new USA trems are good and perfectly usable, but the Asian-made ones are dreadful."

Do you tend to leave the internal wiring as is?

"With Jazzmasters I tend to leave them stock because the bright 1M pots balance out very well with the mellow pickups. I have sometimes swapped the 50K tone pot in the rhythm circuit for a 250K, but the few people who use the rhythm circuit tend to do reverberant and ambient type things with it, rather than cleaner sounds, and they don't want the top end attack anyway. Jaguar pickups are bright and can be harsh, so my preference is 250K for the tone and 500K for the volume."

Is there a remedy for loose vibrato arms?

"Yes, take the arm out and the tremolo system off, and you'll see the collet where the arm pushes into is split to form four little tabs. If you very carefully and gently squeeze the tabs together, when you push the arm back in, they should grip it tighter. If they swing and squeak, you can use the graphite powder on the body end of the arm, or try wrapping it with PTFE tape [also knowns as 'thread seal tape' or 'plumber's tape'] then push it back in. You can get it from the plumbing area in B&Q and a roll should last you years. PTFE tape can be used to firm up the grub screws in the bridge posts, too."

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Gear Reviews

We've got a fantastic selection of new gear for you to pore over this month, and where better to start than Fender's new American Professional Jaguar and Jazzmaster – are these really offsets for everyone? Elsewhere, we're riding the retro train with the return of Supro guitars and an aged acoustic from Eastman, while Maxon's overdrives are a blast from the past of a different kind. It's not all old-school though – Seymour Duncan's Andromeda is as cutting edge as it gets, while the GS Mini Bass is a clever new idea from Taylor – there's something for everyone!

Fender American Professional Jazzmaster & Jaguar 66
A radical new take on Fender's classic offset designs

Supro Americana Series Sahara & Martinique 72
The US brand's revival continues with some new electrics

Eastman E10OOSS/V 76
Retro acoustic with a unique aged look

Two-Rock Burnside 80
US boutique giant takes on the tweed amp sound

Maxon OD-808 & OD-9 85
Two classic Screamers from the firm that first made them

Neunaber Immerse Reverberator 88
High-end reverb versatility in a compact package

Seymour Duncan Andromeda 91
Versatile and highly tweakable delay pedal

House Of Tone JazzHouse & E-Type 92
UK pickup maker gets in on the offset game

Taylor GS Mini Bass 94
Compact acoustic sensation gets a bass version

Offset To Stun

Fender has another stab at fixing the some of the nototious eccentricities of its classic offset designs. **RICHARD PURVIS** finds out what's changed...

Fender's Jazzmaster and Jaguar have not always felt the love from guitar magazines. In the old days, they only really cared about three genres of music – blues, rock and blues-rock – and so it's perhaps not surprising that they didn't have much time for plinky planks favoured by grungey noiseniks with rough hair and even rougher technique. But those days are long over, and while Fender's offsets might still be something of a niche concern, they have an undeniable cachet of cool, being seen in the hands of everyone from J Mascis and Kurt Cobain to Slipknot's Jim Root and Foals' Jimmy Smith.

The reason that many guitarists may still a bit lukewarm, however, is that in contrast to its more famous solidbodies, there's a perception that Fender didn't quite nail things with the offsets first time around. They have a reputation for being eccentric and difficult to work with, particularly in a professional environment.

Lots of people who buy vintage offsets immediately mod them – bridges are replaced, pickups are upgraded, pot values are changed... it's a lot of work. So with that in mind, while there's lots to be said for vintage-correct recreations, wouldn't it be great if Fender put all that aside for a minute and gave us a top-spec Jazzmaster and Jaguar that didn't require any fiddling at all? Well, thanks to the latest entries in the American Professional range, your prayers may have been answered...

Fender American Professional Jazzmaster

You don't see many Jazzmasters with maple fretboards – for many die-hards it's a cardinal sin – but you can't deny this guitar is >

The maligned rhythm circuit is replaced with a phase switch for both pickups

Just like the Johnny Marr model, the Jag now has a four-way pickup selector

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you're happy with more traditional specs, **Fender**'s **American Vintage '65** versions of these guitars are still available (**£1,729**). The **Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar** (**£1,999**) modernises the formula with taste and class – and there are plenty of boutique alternatives nowadays, including the **Bilt Revelator LS** (**£2,689**). Otherwise, save your pennies, pick your own specs and place an order with the **Fender Custom Shop**

gorgeous. The new Mystic Seafoam finish is a triumph, combining with that maple board to create a look of magical radiance worthy of a Disney princess. Let's hope this is the Disney happy ending we Jazzmaster lovers have been waiting for.

And what a wait its been. Since Fender released the American Vintage Jazzmaster in 1999, we've had to make do with old-fashioned 7.25-inch radius fretboards, rocking bridges that don't always stay where you ask them to, strings that pop out of the threaded-barrel saddles, push-in vibrato arms that work loose, inaccessible truss rods, a tendency towards shrillness, and a muffled 'rhythm' circuit that usually only gets engaged by accident.

The American Pro addresses all of these issues. The 'board radius is a bend-friendly 9.5 inches, the bridge is secured by nylon inserts, the saddles are more reliable Mustang types, the

These guitars are Fender's attempt to broaden the appeal of the Jazzmaster and Jaguar

arm is screw-in, and truss rod access is at the headstock end. The new V-Mod pickups are overwound for added beef, and even the pots have been looked at – they're 500k instead of the usual 1-meg types, which should compensate for the bright maple board at least. And yes, the rhythm circuit is gone.

Joining our Mystic Seafoam guitar in the maple 'board stakes is a more restrained Sonic Grey model, while fans of more conventional looks can get a rosewood fingerboard with either Sunburst or Olympic White colour options. All have a 'deep C' neck with 22 frets described as 'narrow-tall'.

The three-way pickup switch moves up to where the rhythm circuit controls used to be – but it's actually slightly closer to the neck than that. Players with drifting right hands be warned: you may whack it by mistake even more often than you did the old one. And fans of the rhythm circuit's mellow tones be even more warned: the body is not routed to make reinstating it a simple job.

Fender American Professional Jaguar

Much of what we said about the Jazzmaster is equally applicable to the Jaguar. The main difference, in fact, is that this new colour – Olive

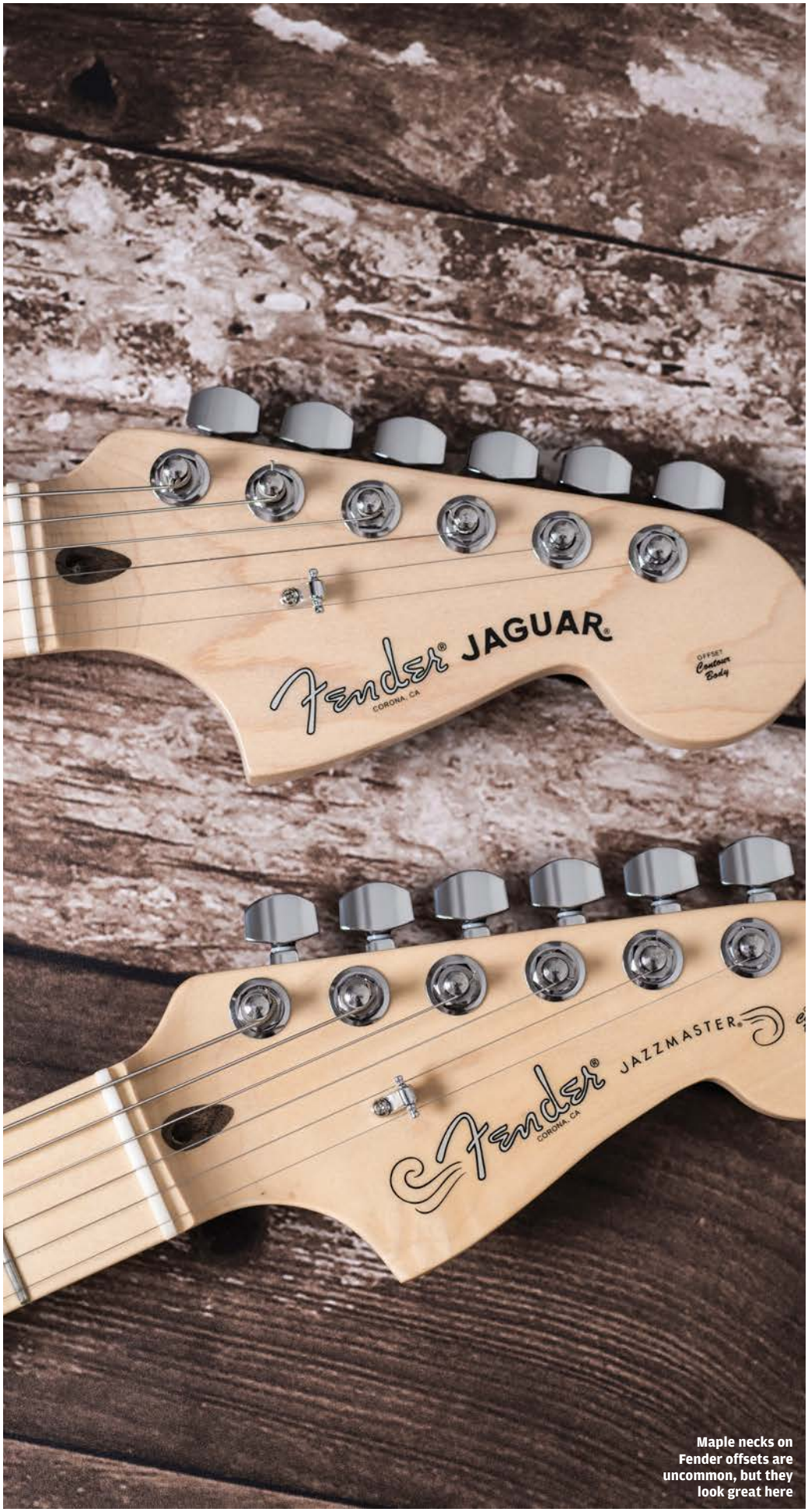
Mustang saddles replace the annoying threaded originals

Green – is even more seductive in the flesh than Mystic Seafoam.

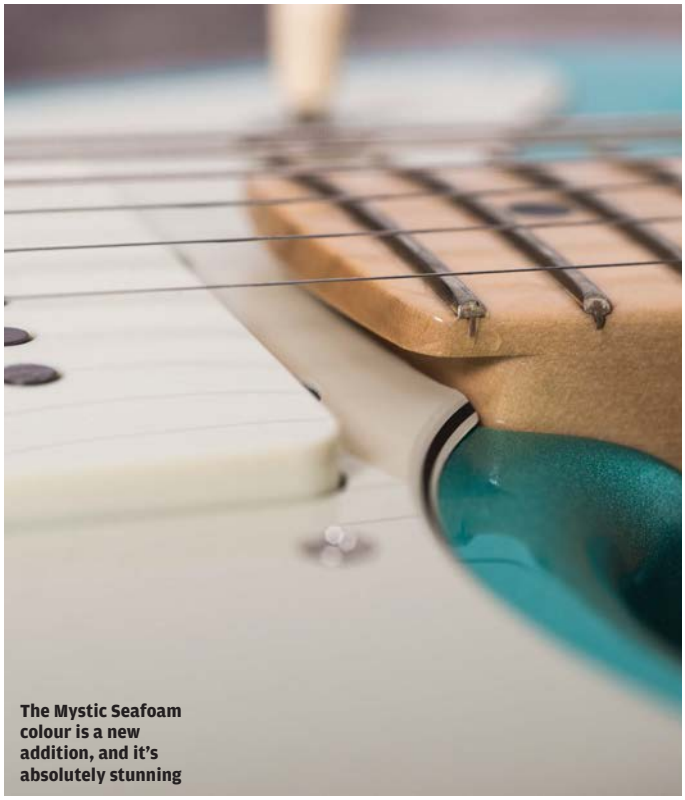
The neck profile, bridge, whammy bar, pots and fretboard are all the same as the other guitar's, but what's unique to the American Pro Jaguar is its switching arrangement. The usual three sliders at the bottom make way for a more practical four-way switch, the fourth position being both pickups in series – an idea lifted from the fantastic Johnny Marr signature model. This time the rhythm circuit is replaced by a single slider to knock the pickups out of phase in the two 'both' positions – so there's no room for the bass-cutting 'strangle switch'. As with all Jaguars, the scale length is the other big difference between the two, coming in at a 24 inches.

In Use

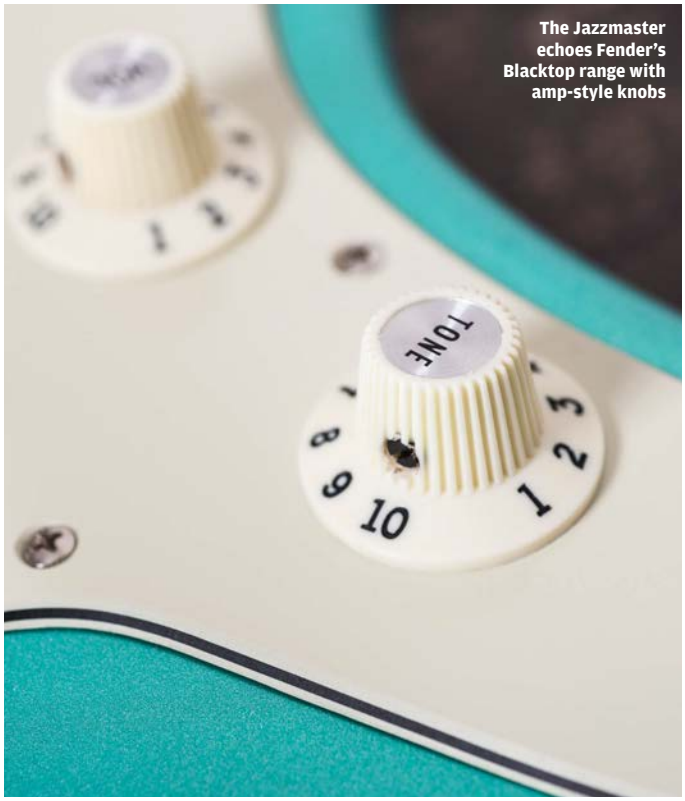
There's no avoiding the reality that the American Pro Jazzmaster doesn't really sound much like a Jazzmaster >



Maple necks on Fender offsets are uncommon, but they look great here



The Mystic Seafoam colour is a new addition, and it's absolutely stunning



The Jazzmaster echoes Fender's Blacktop range with amp-style knobs

in the classic sense. But it's very nice nonetheless: bright and clear on all three pickup settings, with excellent note definition from string to string and plenty of phasey chime in the middle position. This is a sound with much more punch and focus than a normal Jazzmaster; what you don't get are the classic percussive 'plunk' on the wound strings, the sweetly fragile shimmer on the high notes, and the delicious sparkliness in slowly strummed chords.

Unscrew one of the pickup covers and you'll find the reason for this: the coils are extra-deep and so narrow they don't even half-fill the bobbins. You might call them Strat pickups in disguise. If you're an offset-sceptic, you may be quite happy about this; if you're a hardcore fan, however, you might miss that classic sound.

Some of the other changes also come with baggage. Those nylon inserts certainly add stability to the bridge, while still allowing it to rock slightly, but we're not sure if they'll stop it creeping downwards over time – a common complaint that the Staytrem aftermarket bridge fixed with simple plastic bushings. Also, the saddles' fixed 56mm spacing means both E strings are rather close to the edges of the neck on the upper frets. Maybe this isn't a biggie, but again, we look to the Staytrem and Mastery bridges with their trouble-free 52mm spacing...

Like the Jazzmaster, the Jaguar is a real pleasure to play – the chunky neck feels great and we have no qualms about those frets, which are really only 'slightly narrow, slightly tall'. More importantly, the Jaguar hasn't been quite so radically revoiced. The short scale keeps the bottom end lightweight, and clean tones are pure and vivid in a way that's uniquely Jaggy. That fourth setting adds a useful humbucker-like option, and the phase switch brings hollowed-out tones that are more pleasing to modern ears than positions two and four on a Strat.

The V-Mod pickups are again on the hot side, however, and what you gain in clarity and solidity you lose in expressive character. Next to an American Vintage model it feels a bit stiff. All that delicate, twinkly stuff we were missing in the Jazzmaster? You won't find it here either.

So it's not a classic Jag, but you won't mind that if you're coming from Strats and Teles... and maybe that's a clue to the target market for both of these instruments. We suspect that they're offsets for people who don't like offsets. These guitars might not be the Disney ending that vintage offset fans were hoping for, but they're undeniably lovely guitars. This is Fender's attempt to broaden the appeal of the Jazzmaster and Jaguar rather than please die-hards, and who can blame them?

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Professional Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £1,539 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody offset guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 9.5" radius maple fingerboard, 22 narrow-tall frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Jazzmaster/Jaguar bridge with brass Mustang saddles, screw-in vibrato arm
- **ELECTRICS** Two V-Mod single-coil pickups, three-way switch, master volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.8kg/8.4lbs
- **FINISHES** Mystic Seafoam (as reviewed), Sonic grey (both w/ maple 'boards); 3-colour Sunburst and Olympic white (both w/ rosewood 'boards, £1,569)
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 0845 305 1122 **fender.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Big, clear, hi-fi tones
+ Looks stunning in this new colour
- They still haven't quite nailed the optimal bridge design
- It's basically a 'Stratmaster' as opposed to a classic Jazzmaster

It sounds as pretty as it looks, and if you aren't a die-hard Jazzmaster obsessive, there's much to love

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Professional Jaguar

- **PRICE** £1,539 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 9.5" radius maple fingerboard, 22 narrow-tall frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Jazzmaster/Jaguar bridge with brass Mustang saddles, screw-in vibrato arm
- **ELECTRICS** Two V-Mod single-coil pickups, four-way switch (bridge, both in parallel, neck, both in series), phase switch for 'both' positions, master volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 610mm/24"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4kg/8.8lbs
- **FINISHES** Antique Olive (as reviewed), Sonic grey (both w/ maple 'boards); 3-colour Sunburst and Olympic white (both w/ rosewood 'boards, £1,569)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Improved switching set-up offers six cool sounds
+ Looks even sexier than the American Pro Jazzmaster
- Those bridge issues again
- Again, it's more of a 'Straguar'

Again not one for the purists, but this is a fine guitar that might win the Jaguar some new fans

8/10

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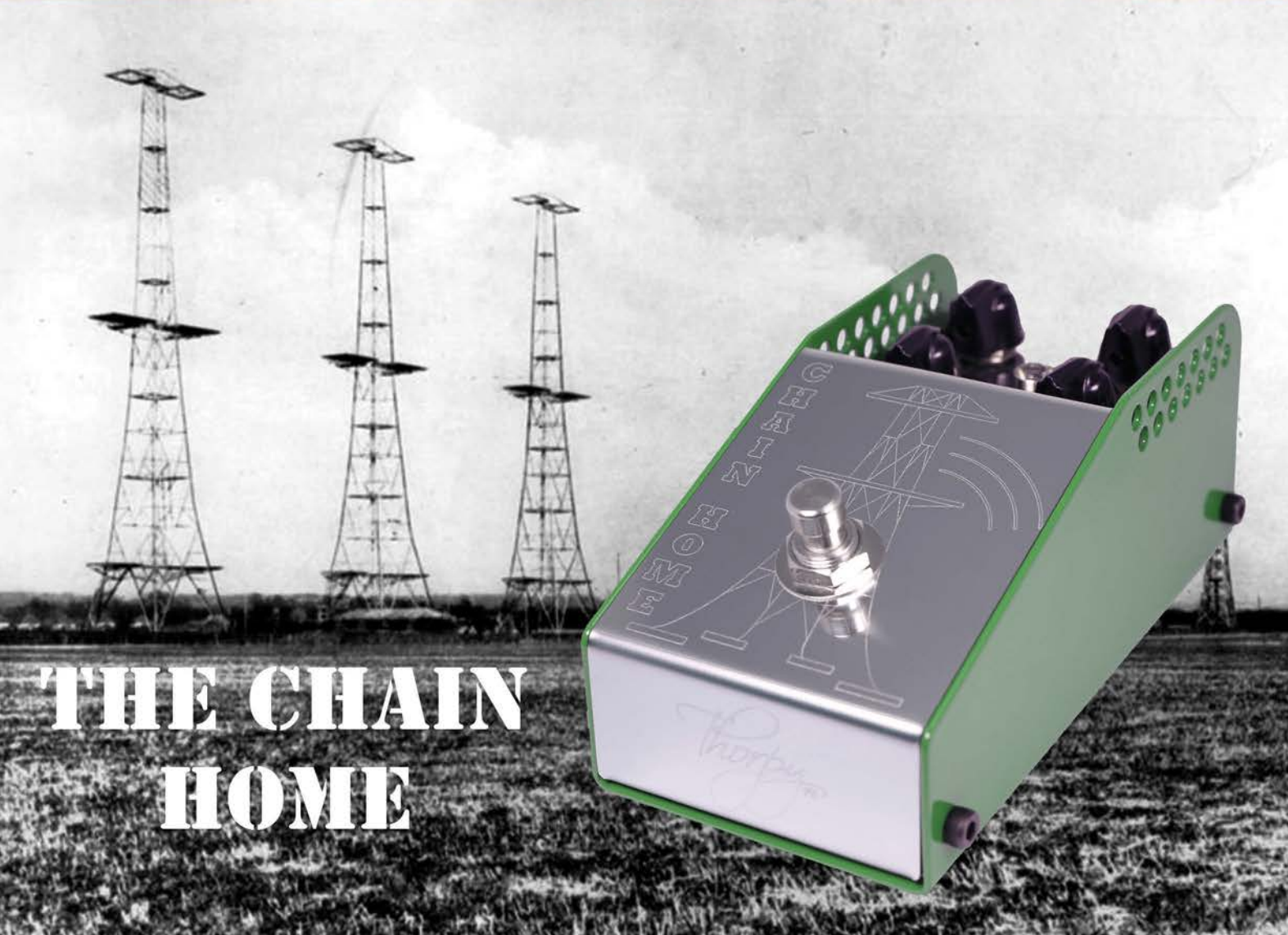
CHAIN HOME
THE CHAIN HOME

Sahara

The twin pickups give the Martinique a bit more versatility

Both Supros have faithful repros of the firm's 1960s Vistatone pickup

Supro Americana Series Martinique & Sahara

The reborn 60s brand follows up its range of killer amps with the original plastic fantastic punk and blues machines. **ED MITCHELL** finds out what gets Jack and Dan so excited...

Rebooted US brand Supro has jostled its way into our good books with a series of splendid valve amps in recent years. Easy on the eye, and forever tied to first album-era Led Zeppelin and Jimmy Page, these amps are the descendants of the once affordable but well-respected backline originally built by Valco in Chicago.

Now, the pawn shop prize Supro guitars of the 60s are also back, with a brace of new Chinese-made models that includes the single pickup Sahara and a reissue of the Martinique model championed by Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys.

Both guitars feature a clam-shell design, with a front and back screwed together to make a kind of lightweight, semi-acoustic calzone. Original Supros had a 'Res-O-Glas' back and top reinforced with internal wood blocks to provide an anchor point for the pickups, tailpiece and a bolt-on neck. Some late models were tweaked with a chambered mahogany back and a Res-O-Glas top, and that's what we have on the spec sheet of these reissues.

The Res-O-Glas top is now ABS plastic [aka 'Acousti-Glass'] with a flawless Wedgwood Blue Metallic finish on the Sahara, and Ermine White on the Martinique. By 1966, Supro guitars sacrificed originality for a Franken-Fender direction – the earlier Res-O-Glas models were more innovative in terms of construction but the body is obviously informed by the Rickenbacker Combo 600. The genius was that Valco could recreate German-carved contours using inexpensive moulded fibreglass. No craftsmen or chisel required.

> In the right hands, you'll see that the Martinique is a terrific lo-fi punk-blues machine

The join between the two halves of each body is dressed-up with a rubber seal – white on the Sahara, black on the Martinique. The guitars share an old-school compensated rosewood floating bridge, anchored with a pair of small screws for added stability. The ball-ends of the strings on the Sahara are anchored with a dobro-style tailpiece, while the Martinique has a robust bent steel unit topped with what looks like a block of billet aluminium with cutouts to hold the strings in place.

Both guitars have a bolt-on maple neck with a slim D profile, a rosewood 'board playing host to 21 medium jumbo frets, plus an extra zero fret. The necks are held in place >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SUPRO AMERICANA SERIES MARTINIQUE

Airline's '59 Coronado (£927) takes the classic Res-O-Glas Supro body shape, but renders it in chambered mahogany. You still get the old school rubber trim, however, plus a pair of humbuckers instead of the Vistatones. Trevor Wilkinson worked on the new Supro range, but before that he designed the **Italia Mondial Classic (£799)**, which pays tribute to the Martinique with its built-in piezo pickup. Throwback king **Danelectro** skipped its own substantial back catalogue in favour of the Mosrite-y **'64 (£1,099)**. It's well-made and available in a bunch of cool finishes

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SUPRO AMERICANA SERIES SAHARA
Eastwood has been making Airline recreations for some time, and the **'59 1P (£695)** is a cracking little single-pickup retro rocket. You get a chambered mahogany body, bolt-on maple neck, and it comes with a case. If you want something with more big-brand cred, then **Gibson's Les Paul Junior (£899)** is the original stripped-down rock 'n' roll machine with a slab mahogany body and single P-90 pickup. Another retro option is the **Fender Mustang 90 (£499)**, this time in a short-scale format with a pair of P-90 pickups

with only two large bolts, but the heel does sit tightly in a deep channel in the body, so stability is good. While the Martinique thumbs its nose at the Sahara's simple dots and unbound 'board and headstock with deluxe block inlays and white binding, it has the same vintage-style tuners. The latter features the three-on-a-plate format, and tulip buttons that feel as good as they look.

In Use

These are essentially semi-acoustic guitars, so there's enough air knocking about inside to produce a decent blast of volume before you even trouble your amplifier.

Both come loaded with Supro's Vistatone pickup – one for the Sahara; two for the Martinique. The original Vistatone has a cult following, and the humbucker-looking single-coil reboots here are faithful reproductions of what Ralph Keller designed for Valco in 1952.

Plugging in the Sahara, we find the Vistatone isn't far away from a fat Tele pickup. It's bright and jangly without being shrill, and it warms up considerably when you back off the tone control. The Martinique offers a spot on impression of the Sahara in the bridge position but you get other voices to explore thanks to the three-way selector switch and dedicated volume and tone controls for the front and back pups. Cleans are bright and punchy – likely thanks to that mahogany and plastic combo.

But we didn't come here to talk about clean tones. As Jack White and Dan Auerbach have taught us, the Vistatone thrives when exposed to germanium-fuelled fuzz. What's great about these pickups is they allow you to rock out without sounding like a metalhead. There's plenty of grunt but the fat single-coil voice allows for great note separation and you get a rough edge that's more White Stripes than Joe Bonamassa.

Flicking to the middle or bridge position on the Martinique adds girth to the fuzz while unleashing more unpredictability in the harmonic delivery. Pull the fuzz intensity back a bit and let the guitar and your right hand control the dynamics and you're in classic 60s garage territory.

While the Sahara is basically a one-trick pony, the versatility of the Martinique is boosted by a piezo pickup system with its own volume and tone controls. The tone won't displace your D-28, but it is a lot of fun. Think of it more like an ancient resonator sound than authentic acoustic impersonator and you'll see that, in the right hands, this thing is a terrific lo-fi punk-blues machine.

Let's be honest, us retro-philes are as much buying into the looks as anything else. If you don't get that itch when you come across colour-matched bodies and headstocks, sexy yet impractical vibrato units or a guitar crowded with twice as many control knobs as it actually needs to function, well, you're never going to take the thing home.

The new Supro models scratch that itch, but they back up the throwback aesthetic with quality construction, better than 60s playability and some damn good pickups. Given that 60s survivors will set you back a fortune nowadays – if you can find one – these guitars represent a good deal. In other words... Supro. Smashing. Great.

The distinctive Supro headstock is complimented by some lovely, tulip-buttoned tuners

KEY FEATURES

Supro Americana Series Martinique

- **PRICE** £1,099
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow 6-string electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany back with moulded 'Acousti-Glass' ABS plastic top, chrome bent-steel tailpiece, anchored rosewood bridge, bolt-on maple neck with bound rosewood fingerboard, block inlays, 21 medium jumbo frets with zero fret, black single-ply scratchplate, vintage-style tuners with large tulip buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Supro Vistatone single coils, plus piezo pickup
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, volume and tone for each pickup, three-way toggle switch, piezo pickup volume and tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Ermine White (as reviewed)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 18mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.2kg/7.10lbs

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ It's as pretty as an Art Deco picture
+ First class playability
+ The Vistatone pickups are great

– No case feels a bit stingy at this level
– The top is a bit knob-heavy

An original Martinique is out of reach for most of us but this gives us the looks and tone we need, and probably plays better than a 60s survivor

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro Americana Series Sahara

- **PRICE** £649
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow 6-string electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany back with moulded 'Acousti-Glass' ABS plastic top, chrome dobro-style tailpiece, anchored rosewood bridge, bolt-on maple neck with rosewood fingerboard, dot inlays, 21 medium jumbo frets with zero fret, white single-ply scratchplate, vintage-style tuners with large tulip buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 1x Vistatone single-coil
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, master tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Wedgwood Blue (as reviewed)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 18mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.7kg/6.13lbs
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381 **www.suprousa.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ It looks fantastic
+ The old-school tones from that Vistatone pickup are impressive
+ Ultra-comfortable neck profile

– Again, it's a shame there's no gigbag or case included

A great meat and potatoes garage punk guitar that looks as cool as a Chevy Corvette Stingray

7/10

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Eastman
Handcrafted Guitar
Model E10OOSS/V

Eastman E10OOSS/V

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Eastman's Antique Varnish electrics have caused a stir in these parts of late. **HUW PRICE** finds out if the company's acoustics offer a similar blend of great tone, vibe and value...

Last month, we mentioned in our review of the fabulous Atkin 'The Forty Three' that artificially aged acoustic guitars were scarce compared to their electric cousins, so of course, a month later another one lands in our laps! However, as you may well remember from the Antique Varnish SB59/V electric that we looked at back in our May 2017 issue, Eastman's attitude to artificial ageing is very different to the treatments you'll see on other guitars. We detailed the process at length back in May, but suffice to say, Eastman's aged guitars look well used, without looking abused – and so it is with this acoustic.

The finish isn't nitrocellulose, so there's no checking or that characteristic jagged-edged rub through. Instead Eastman's process involves six distinct steps starting with a grain filling basecoat, then colour application, followed by French polishing. The coats are sanded as they're layered to keep the finish as thin as possible. You should also note that while shellac is a traditional finish for classical guitars and violin-style instruments, it's comparatively soft, easy to wear through and offers minimal protection. However if you like the idea of developing a personal patina on your instrument, and doing so quickly, shellac is ideal.

The result is an acoustic that looks like its been around then block, but well looked after, too. The colour is a particularly attractive shade of muted cherry and appears to have been hand rubbed into a subtle burst front and back. The 'play wear' on the back of the neck and the lower bout is very convincing and even under close scrutiny it looks completely authentic. The top's rubbed area reveals an amber base coat that looks like something you might see on a 19th century Martin – we'd certainly be interested in seeing that as a finish option on its own.

> The Eastman impresses with an unusually loud, full and harmonically rich tone

Finding plain, off-white binding is no easy feat – as this reviewer discovered during our recent Gretsch Anniversary conversion – but here it's really convincing. It's nothing fancy – just alternating layers of black and off-white – but it's accurately done and neatly scraped to provide contrast with the tinted colour coats.

While this feels like a guitar in the boutique domain, there are some hints at its real-world price tag. The faux binding around the soundhole is finer in concept than execution and the finish around the fingerboard tongue is a little scruffy. Similarly, the patchy stain on the bone nut and saddle walks the tightrope between appearing to be an example of simulated distress or a production oversight.

There's definitely no oversight with the exquisitely carved stacked heel and superb fretwork, however, and the pearl dots on the pale rosewood fingerboard raise the standard further. Heading to the side of the 'board, the shiny white side dots might be easier to see than off-white, but they do feel a little incongruous next to the aged binding.

The tuners are open-geared examples from Asian OEM hardware giant, Ping – but pings or noises of any kind are thankfully absent when in use. They're super smooth in feel and make accurate tuning speedy and stress free.

Internally, things look good, with fairly narrow and tall back braces, and the Eastman logo branded into the back's centre strip. Since the >

KEY FEATURES

Eastman E10OOSS/V

- **PRICE** £1,329 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Adirondack spruce top with mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, rosewood bridge, fingerboard and peghead overlay, 14th fret neck join, open-gear tuners bone nut and saddle, plastic binding, dual-action truss rod, 20 Jescar nickel-silver frets
- **SCALE LENGTH** 328mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 21mm at 7th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.75kg/3.85lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Antique Classic
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.com**

The neck features a simulated wear pattern that looks the part

These delicate open-gear tuners fit perfectly with the retro vibes

The rosewood headstock overlay keeps things understated and classy

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

With a 12th fret join and slotted headstock, the **Ibanez AVN6-DTS Artwood (£479)** features a laminated body, solid spruce top and a distressed tobacco sunburst finish. With an all-solid 000-sized mahogany/spruce body, the **Recording King ROS-A9M (£232)** is retro but not relic'd. At the other extreme, **Atkin**'s **The Forty Three (£2,999)** has a torrefied top, the highest build standard and an artfully relic'd nitrocellulose finish

sides are solid mahogany, like the back, strips of rosewood have been glued between the front and back kerfings to restrict progress in the event of accident-induced splits.

In Use

Sitting down to play, we find that the E10OOSS/V is a tad neck-heavy, despite those lightweight open-gear tuners. In truth this is probably more down to the light weight of the body than any excess weight or a heftier than usual dual-action truss rod – it's a very minor dip anyway.

Measuring 14.5 inches across, the body size is narrower than Martin's 000 and OM models, but at 4.375 inches, the body is deeper, so there's plenty of internal volume and it's extremely comfortable to hold. Neck depth is medium and while the 'C' profile doesn't exactly ooze vintage-style character, it has a very playable and appealingly familiar feel.

Tapping the body elicits a very lively back with several clear notes. You could conceivably label up each area like a steel drum to play tunes on it. The top produces fewer notes, but it has a musical ring and you can feel a highly encouraging kick back when you tap just behind the bridge.

Starting with open chords, the E10OOSS/V immediately impresses with an unusually loud, full and harmonically rich tone. It's loud enough when you're playing it, but for the full effect you need to hear the E10OOSS/V when someone else is playing to appreciate how well this guitar projects. Quite frankly it's a bit of a tone cannon.

However that doesn't mean it's merely loud and brash. Played fingerstyle the E10OOSS/V is crisply defined, precise and very complex. The tonal signature is bright but never thin, as the body's internal volume provides a full midrange.

Although not thunderous, the bass is amply deep to underpin bluegrass rhythms and alternating basslines. Better still, even with the regular 12 gauge strings the low end holds together superbly as the E10OOSS/V is dropped to open D and C tunings.

Excellent string-to-string balance keeps picking easy and strumming dynamics consistent. The E10OOSS/V is one of those acoustics that seems to produce more than the sum of its parts. Play two notes and it sounds like a full chord, play three and the overtones begin to swirl, then play a chord and the harmonic assault is almost like acoustic overdrive. Think beefed up parlour meets Martin treble with a hint of Gibson woodiness in the lower midrange.

Without being a strict vintage clone, the E10OOSS/V has an old school tone that doesn't too closely resemble any of the classic brands, and demonstrates Eastman's considerable expertise building acoustic instruments.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Outstanding tone and very easy playability
+ High-quality build materials
+ Fingerstyle-friendly string spacing
- Some detailing is a bit scruffy
- Artificial distress polarises opinion

Aged-finish acoustics aren't for everyone, but the playability, vibe and sheer tonal quality here is undeniable

9/10

MINI MONSTERS

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Two-Rock Burnside

With designer Bill Krinard back on board at Two-Rock, this latest offering promises vintage and modern tweed voicings in one amp. **HUW PRICE** feels the burn...

Two-Rock amps have become a regular sight on stages and studios all over the globe thanks to their flawless build quality and stunning interpretations of big-bottle blackface tone. The Burnside is a little bit different, however, as it takes inspiration from further back in the timeline of guitar amp evolution and attempts to offer a new take on tones from Fender's classic and hugely influential tweed era.

Two-Rock amps have always won plaudits for the quality of their internals but for our money, the Burnside is the company's best-looking amplifier to date. With an en vogue black lacquered tweed cabinet and a wheat-coloured woven grille cloth, plus a stylish metal nameplate adorning the front, this amp looks really smart – and of course, it's all flawlessly finished.

Available in combo and head formats, the Burnside's front panel provides easy access and on the back panel you'll find passive effects loop connections and three speaker outputs. This combo has a Warehouse WGS G12C speaker and its 75W power handling is copes easily with the Burnside's 18W 6V6 powered output.

It's billed as Two-Rock's version of the wide panel tweed circuit but no mention is made of a specific tweed amplifier. With treble, bass and presence controls we ventured a 5E4 Super with the GZ34 rectifier beefing up the power supply and Two-Rock confirmed this.

In Use

If, like this reviewer, you're used to using tweed amps with three controls – and you only ever really use two of them – the provision of separate treble and bass controls is a little disorienting at first. You won't be able to do the usual tone and volume balancing technique you're familiar with, but the increased controls are actually very powerful once you get to know them.

> Two-Rock is to be commended for adding a modern twist to the tweed Super format

Since the Burnside operates in fixed-bias mode, easy access is provided to a measurement point and a bias potentiometer from the outside of the chassis. The internal circuitry is mostly mounted on an eyelet board with a small amount of point-to-point wiring. The majority of resistors are carbon comps and signal capacitors include Sprague Orange Drops and Mallory 150s.

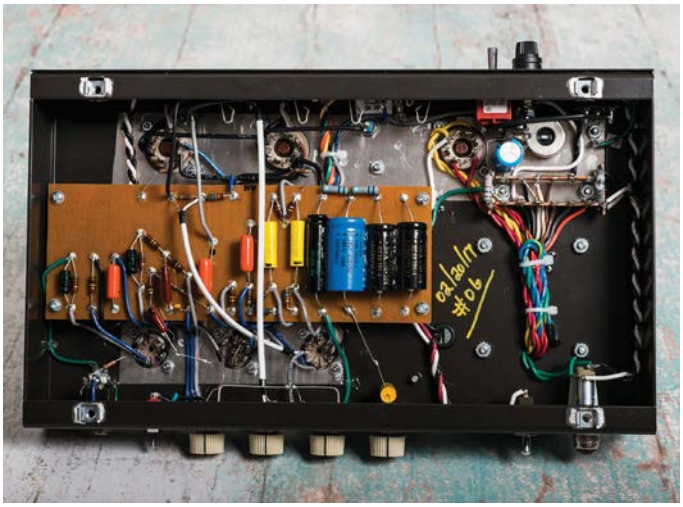
As described, the Burnside covers vintage and modern flavours of tweed tone and you need to get to grips with the way the controls and bright switch assist you to access the full range of sounds.

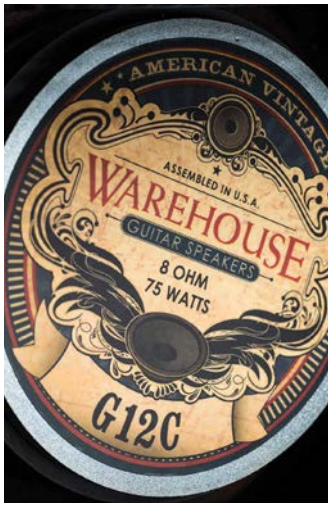
Bright switches were a feature on various blackface Fender amps, but it was never a tweed thing. Although some of the later and bigger tweeds could deliver extended >

KEY FEATURES

Two-Rock Burnside

- **PRICE** £2,199
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel fixed bias valve combo. Made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 18W
- **VALVES** 1 x 12AY7, 2 x 12AX7, 2 x 6V6, 1 x GZ34
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input, bright switch, volume, treble, bass, presence, on/standby
- **REAR PANEL** Loop send & return, 4-ohm, 8-ohm & 16-ohm speaker outputs, power switch, IEC socket
- **SPEAKER** Warehouse WGS G12C
- **DIMENSIONS** 397 x 495 x 254mm
- **WEIGHT** 16.3kg/36lbs
- **OPTIONS** Blonde tolex
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
  www.coda-music.com
  www.two-rock.com





Most of the components are mounted on an old-school eyelet board (above)

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Bad Cat Bobcat 20R** (**£989**) is another tweed-inspired circuit but it's a tighter and rockier offering with onboard reverb. With bass emphasis and bright switches and a middle control the **Morgan Amplification SW22R** (**£2,144**) also has reverb. **Tone King's Falcon Grande** (**£2,199**) has three voicings and built in attenuation and reverb

high frequency sheen, many low-and mid-powered tweeds tended to have slightly rolled-off treble. The Burnside's bright switch gives you that extended treble, but things can get edgy and shrill if you don't adjust volume and treble accordingly.

As with the various tweed Deluxe models, there's an interaction between the Burnside's volume and treble control. So turning up treble simultaneously brightens the sound and increases gain. With the bright switch engaged, you may feel inclined to sweeten things by backing off treble, but you need to increase volume to maintain the same amount of drive. On the other hand, the bright switch allows you to brighten the tone without increasing gain, so in a sense you get brightness without compromising clean headroom.

With late-50s big box tweed and blackface-style tone circuits (and this also applies to many amp brands in addition to Fender) the bass control's function is to shape the low end to retain definition and prevent boominess. The Burnside's bass control performs differently.

Roll back the treble and presence, roll off the bass, then crank the volume and you get a sweet small box tweed tone with tight, snappy bass, and full midrange. Slowly turn up the bass and there's a dramatic increase in gain that is mostly confined to the bass and low midrange.

It's a delicious, horn-like grind and the Warehouse speaker holds its composure in a way an old Jensen never could. Pushing the bass, things get even hairier as the overdrive extends higher into the midrange.

Things continue in this vein until the very last twist of the knob where the upper mids suddenly and unexpectedly dip. It's a fabulous setting that makes our T-style test guitar sound more like a baritone saxophone on the low strings, while the sweetened plain strings drift effortlessly into blooming sustain.

Having established its credentials as a fire-breathing early 50s handful, it's time to explore the Burnside's more nuanced and refined side. This is an amp that can certainly do the pretty and shimmery stuff, though we can't quite nail the ethereal, floating harmonics of a vintage tweed Super or Deluxe.

Thinking it might be attributable to the ceramic magnet speaker we try running the Burnside through a Celestion Blue and a Fane A60 – both of which have alnico magnets. This reveals that the Burnside has no shortage of upper harmonics and that Two-Rock has chosen a speaker that matches the Burnside's circuit and cabinet particularly well.

The Warehouse softens what might otherwise be quite aggressive, strident highs and provides an interesting upper midrange bite that cuts through mixes particularly well. However the Warehouse's 134Hz resonance frequency puts it in the danger zone for semis and semi-solids and the low-mid feedback is hard to avoid with guitars like big-bodied Gretsches and ES-330s.

Tweed players will also notice how a lack of speaker compression and breakup combines with the robust power supply. The result is less of a 'vintage' touchy feely quality, but the firmer and more robust response will be a positive for many. Two-Rock confirms you can change the GZ34 to a 5U4, 5Y3 or a 5V4 for a softer feel. Having tried all three, a 5V4 or 5U4 provides more vintage touch dynamics and a far sweeter treble response without losing bass cohesion, but the 5Y3 is a tad soft.

We find the Burnside's stock circuit is oriented a little on the bright side, which means that the treble and presence controls mostly end up being used for cuts rather than boosts. The volume control's hair-trigger contour makes it tricky to fine-tune the required amount of overdrive, however this is somewhat related to the tone control settings.

Two-Rock is to be commended for adding a modern twist to the tweed Super format and it's good to know that the Burnside can deliver old-school tones, too.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Impressive sounds
+ Plenty of gain but ample clean headroom, too
+ Powerful tone controls

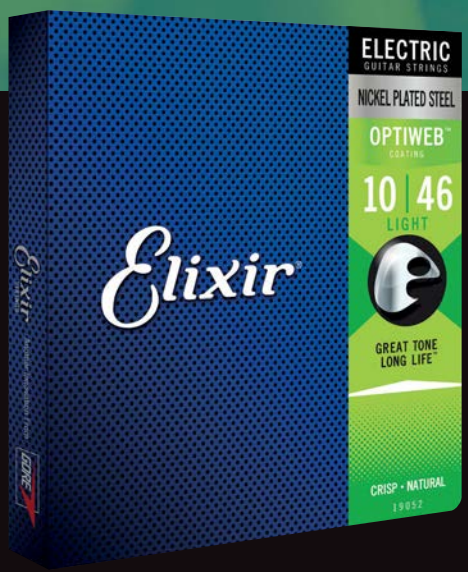
- Non-buffered effects loop
- Playing dynamics slightly stiff
- Treble can get fierce

Two-Rock is to be applauded for bringing sag-free bass, treble extension and versatility to the table, alongside a range of older tweed tones

8/10

"They are bright enough to make even the darkest pickups come alive."

- Chris Loeffier, Harmony Central



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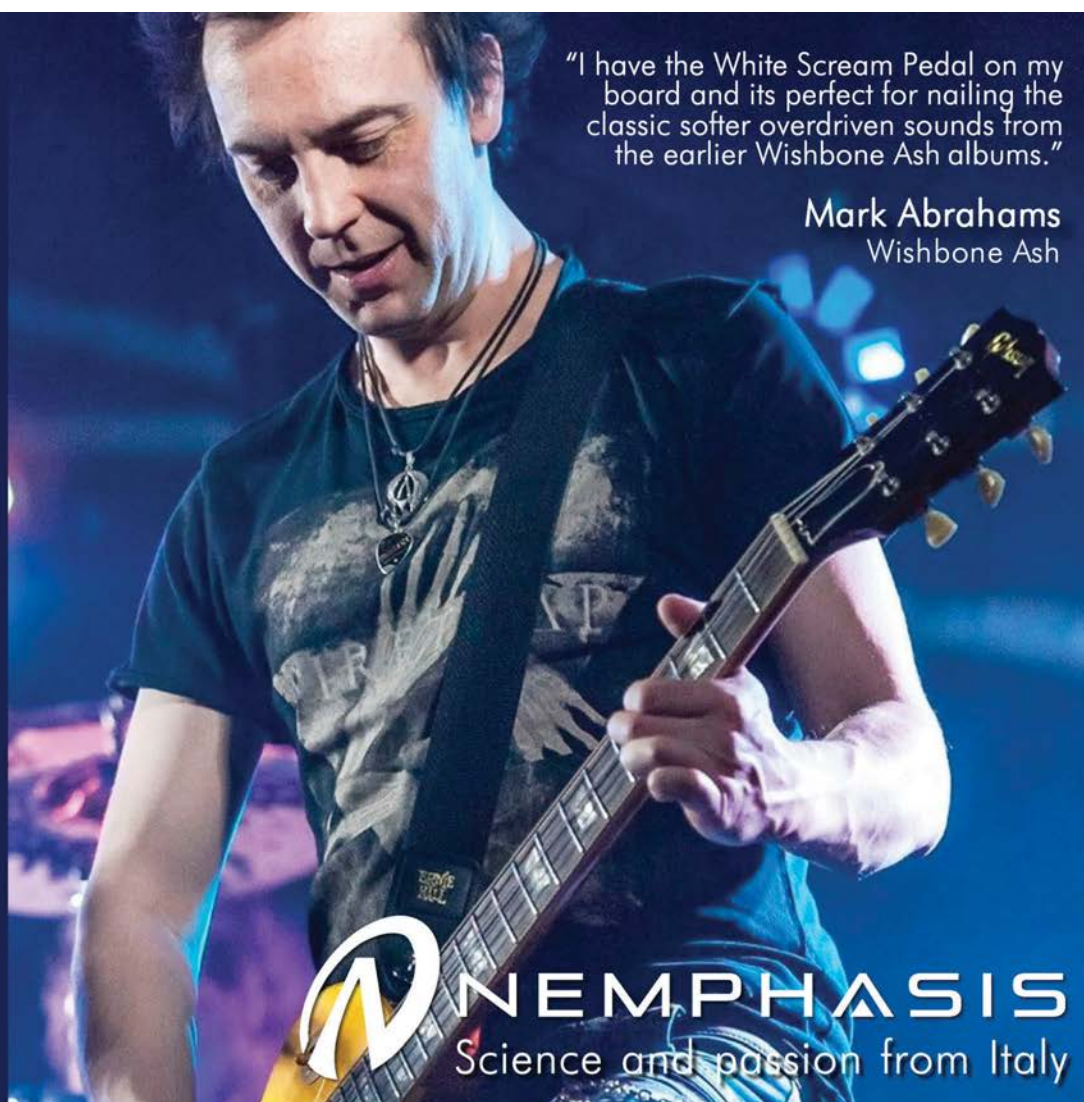

"I have the White Scream Pedal on my board and its perfect for nailing the classic softer overdriven sounds from the earlier Wishbone Ash albums."

Mark Abrahams
Wishbone Ash

NEMPHASIS
Science and passion from Italy

For the purposes of this review we compared the Maxons to a vintage early 1980s Ibanez TS9

Maxon OD808 & OD-9

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

These green machines are not called 'Tube Screamers', but they are built by the company behind the Ibanez originals. **HUW PRICE** compares two new Maxons to a vintage TS9...

The original Tube Screamer was part of a range of pedals Maxon built for Ibanez between 1974 and 2002, establishing Ibanez as a stompbox brand. When the TS808 arrived in 1979, relatively few pedals sought to emulate the sound of cranked up valve amps. Amps had become increasingly powerful and many were designed to run clean. Getting a good overdrive sound with enough sustain for soloing was by no means straightforward. Many a guitarist's heart must have sunk when arriving at a venue to discover a rented Twin Reverb or something solid-state. Carrying a Tube Screamer to gigs ensured they could dial in a usable tone with pretty much any amplifier.

The Susumu Tamura-designed Tube Screamer is the most copied stompbox of all and a name that's synonymous with any op-amp based overdrive that employs clipping diodes in a negative feedback loop. That said, the term 'Tube Screamer clone' is often applied indiscriminately and inaccurately. For most players, the Tube Screamer is closely associated with Stevie Ray Vaughan and he used most versions of it. But special affection is reserved for the first two – the TS808 and the TS9 – and here we're reviewing Maxon's latest take on both models.

The OD-9's overall sound has a refinement that actually gives it a slight edge on the 80s TS9

Ibanez still markets Tube Screamers of its own, although they're no longer made by Maxon. Externally, the Maxon OD-9 is a dead ringer for the Ibanez TS9, but the OD808 has more generic cosmetics.

Both originals had buffers on the input and output that remained in the signal path whether the pedal was on or off. This ensured silent switching and drove long cables properly, but most of modern 'clones' omit the buffers and feature true bypass switching. This is also a popular mod for original units.

The Tube Screamer's emitter follower output buffer is the area of greatest interest because of the two components that follow it in the circuit – a series resistor and a shunt resistor. The values for the classic TS808 are 100R and 10K, and for the TS9 they are 470R and 100K. This is the only difference between the TS9 and the more collectable TS808.

While the Maxon OD-9 is true bypass, the input and output buffers are retained. So it has a vintage-correct circuit, but the buffers are >

Three similar, but subtly different flavours of Tube Screamer tone

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Maxon OD808

Reverb.com estimates the value of original **TS808s** at **£400-£614**, but at the time of writing there were examples listed for well over **£1,000**. **Ibanez** offers a **TS808** reissue (**£140**) and a hand wired **TS808HW** (**£330**)

Maxon OD-9

Reverb's price guide for a 1980s **TS9** suggests **£164-£273** but some immaculate examples are listed at over (**£300**). Ibanez currently produces a reissue of the **TS808** (**£110**), or alternatively you can build a true-bypass 808 with a JRC4558D chip from a **BYOC Classic Overdrive kit** (**£62**)

only in the signal path when the pedal is switched on.

The OD808 has the traditional buffers, however Maxon has deviated from the 808 formula by changing the two output resistors to reduce noise levels. The result is that the new values make the OD808 electronically identical to an original TS9, rather than a TS808.

The other area of interest is the op-amp. Pedal geeks can get pretty fussy about chips and the original JRC4558 has acquired a certain mystique. Here, the TS808 packs a JRC4558, whereas the TS9 has an NJM4558D. Don't panic, however – NJM is simply the name of the company formerly known as JRC, aka The Japanese Radio Corporation.

In Use

We pit the Maxons against a much-loved early 1980s Ibanez TS9, with the pedals placed in true bypass loops to prevent the buffers from muddying the waters, running from the same power supply and into the same amp. Compared to the original TS9, the OD-9 generates higher output and a tad more gain. It's also noticeably sweeter and less fizzy for overdrive and the overall sound has a refinement that actually gives it a slight edge on the oldie.

The OD808 is much closer to the old TS9 and by matching control settings they can sound virtually identical. There's the honk in the low mids, a slightly murky darkness and the noticeable bass roll off.

With both Maxons, as you turn up the tone control, you get that familiar sound of it getting brighter but not necessarily clearer. Compression increases along with the drive, and above a certain point, the increase in compression is more noticeable than any increase in overdrive. When used with an overdriven amp, dialling back the gain and raising the output level reminds us that the TS is one of the sweetest boosts in the business.

The Maxons provide articulate definition, ample sustain and they're both extremely fine implementations of the Tube Screamer circuit with the quirks and charms of the originals. So what does that mean in a practical context? The prevailing climate of the late 1970s should be considered when discussing the supposed shortcomings of original and reissue Tube Screamers – namely the bass and treble roll off, midrange hump, compression and lack of true bypass. People also criticize the lack of transparency, but there are more 'transparent' overdrives out there. With that in mind, we should appreciate the Tube Screamers for what they are, not what the aren't.

Those 'shortcomings' actually make early Tube Screamers ideal overdrive pedals for powerful clean amps. In addition to providing a genuinely valve-like overdrive, the Tube Screamer's bass roll off helps to keep power chords tight and the low pass filter ensures sweet overdrive tone even with the brightest amps.

Also remember that most three-band tone circuits scoop the mids by default, so the mid hump does a fine job of filling out the sound. Since bigger amps have beefed up power supplies, they're often stiff and spiky. The Tube Screamer's compressed tone can make these amps feel a lot more player-friendly. You might even say that they provide many of the things that mid-sized tweed amps do by default.

Having played a Tube Screamer for over 20 years, this reviewer felt right at home with both of these Maxon pedals. It's horses for courses. If you want dead on classic tone, and can live without the classic looks, the OD808 is the one for you. If you like the idea of a clearer and more refined take on this classic overdrive, with the potential added benefit of true bypass switching, go for the OD-9. Maybe it's time to retire that valuable vintage Ibanez TS9...

KEY FEATURES

Maxon OD808

- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal. Made in Japan
- **PRICE** £109
- **CONTROLS** Drive, balance, tone
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass, 9V battery or 9V centre negative power supply (not supplied)
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Fluid sweet sustain with a thick and forward midrange
+ Authentic feel and tone
+ JRC4558D op-amp

– Silent switching is fine, but we'd prefer it to have true bypass

Although it's basically a TS9 rather than a TS808 in a different enclosure, of the two pedals this is the more authentic reissue

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Maxon OD-9

- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal. Made in Japan
- **PRICE** £119
- **CONTROLS** Drive level, tone
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V battery or 9V centre negative power supply (not supplied)

www.maxonfx.com
www.audiodistributiongroup.com

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Vintage looks
+ True bypass with buffered in/out when activated
+ Slightly clearer and less fizzy than original TS9

– Re-branded op-amp may concern the chip purists

Very much like the original but with improved clarity, note separation and higher output if needed

9/10

DRY
VOL
SYNTH
CTRL 1
CTRL 2
SYNTH
synthesizer
machine
1 OBX
2 PROFIT V
3 VIBE SYNTH
4 MINI MOOD
5 EHX MINI
6 SOLO SYNTH
7 MOOD BASS
8 STRING SYNTH
9 POLY VI
OUTPUT DRY
INPUT
electro-harmonix

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Neunaber Immerse Reverberator

A compact reverb pedal with the audio quality and versatility to take on the £400-plus pedalboard-hoggers? **RICHARD PURVIS** immerses himself...

KEY FEATURES

Immerse Reverberator

- **PRICE** £219
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal. Made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Effect level, depth, tone, variable function control (depending on mode selected), eight-way mode switch: wet, hall, plate, spring, 2x shimmer, rev+echo, rev+detune; 'kill dry' and trails switches
- **FEATURES** Mono and stereo inputs and outputs, buffered bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 115x70x46mm
- **CONTACT**
  Audio Distribution Group
  +45 6574 8228
  neunaber.net
  audiodistributiongroup.com

Guitar music goes through wet and dry phases, and right now things are feeling mostly quite soggy. But while the surf twangers were happy with their amplifiers' spring reverbs, and the shoegazers built many a wall of noise with analogue delay, today's ambient soundscapists demand more – more precision, more purity, more options. Lucky for them, then, that digital reverb has been getting so frighteningly good in recent years.

Back in February we reviewed three of the best high-end reverbs – the Strymon Big Sky, Eventide Space and Empress Reverb – and if you'd shown us unicorns playing keepy-uppy we could hardly have been more impressed. But they all cost close to £500, and will fill up your pedalboard space as greedily as they empty your wallet. Is there a place for a top-class multi-mode reverb that's compact and affordable?

If there is, Neunaber might just be the name to fill it. This new-ish American maker is best known for its Expanse series – deceptive three-knob pedals that can be loaded up with all sorts of digital sounds via USB. But there's none of that with the Immerse: this is a straightforward stomper that requires nothing more than a guitar at one end and an amp at the other. Well, that is unless you want to use it in an effects loop... or with two amps in stereo mode.

The obvious advantage of this is that you have many different sounds living inside the unit at once and flit between them with the twist of a rotary switch, rather than having to ask your PC for help; the two disadvantages are that you lose the near-infinite tweakability of software, and that the control layout becomes mighty crowded. There's no appreciable difference in price between this and an Expanse box.

Once you've managed to decode that array of lines and words wiggling down from the central mode control, you'll find there are eight sounds on offer: four standard reverbs, two with 'shimmer', one with added echo (delay) and one intriguingly labelled 'detune'. The bottom-right knob controls a different parameter depending on the mode, while the tone control doubles up as delay time when you're in 'reverb+echo' mode.

Your dry signal stays analogue while digital processing is going on around it, but there's no true bypass – just two flavours of buffered. Reverb trails can be switched off via a switch at the back so the effect will cut out abruptly as soon as you hit the footswitch, rather than dying out naturally, but what you get in return is a little less background noise when the Immerse is bypassed. There's also a 'kill dry' switch that lets you output pure reverb without the

original signal for use in a parallel effects loop. This might also come in useful for ultra-ambient washes of otherworldly weirdness, swirling off into the ether like the cries of a thousand lovelorn angels, however...

In Use

Right, let's go through all eight sounds. 'Wet' is an updated version of the algorithm that powers the Neunaber Wet pedal. It's a richly atmospheric 'verb that can be coloured with some tasteful modulation using that bottom-right function knob... and it sounds huge, especially in stereo. The level, depth and tone controls let you decide exactly how you want the reverb to blend in with your dry signal; and while things can get properly epic, the guitar itself is never swamped.

Hall sounds similar but with a nicely judged pre-delay to keep the dry sound further out in front, and is equally luscious with a dash (or more than a dash) of modulation. Plate differs subtly again, adding some metallic density, and this time you can adjust the length of pre-delay. Inevitably, that's at the expense of modulation – a minor compromise, but perhaps the first sign of the compact format's limitations.

The spring setting isn't wildly different in character from the first three – Neunaber's been careful not to overdo the juddery stuff – but this time it's the bottom end of the reverb that's up for tweakage, meaning you can thin out anything that starts to get boomy at the same time as controlling the highs with the tone control. Now that's tidy.

The pitch-shifting 'shimmer' effect is cropping up on many modern reverbs, and there are a couple of tasty variants here. The two create different harmonic textures, but both allow trilling high notes to push their way through the ambient cloud in ghostly and not always predictable ways. This isn't just reverb with a shrieking upper octave tacked on: they're both highly musical synth-like sounds.

In the final two modes, '+echo' and '+detune', it's the level of the reverb itself that you can adjust with that fifth knob – so turn it all the way off and you can use the effects on their own. The first is a super-sweet delay, and the second is a heavy chorus that's more obviously wobbly. Both of these modes sound excellent with just the right amount of ambience blended back in, and really open up the Immerse's capabilities as more than a mere background-filler. It's a pity you can't have delay with modulation, though.

And those ultra-ambient washes we were wondering about? They're in there – but make that a million lovelorn angels. If you've ever listened to a cathedral organ and thought the best bit was the slow dying of those massive, dissonant overtones after the organist stopped playing, you'll enjoy kneeling in front of your amp for a few sacred moments of this.

> It's a richly atmospheric 'verb that can be coloured with some modulation... and it sounds huge

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Emulations of 'real' reverbs sound beautifully natural
+ Otherworldly stuff is super-lush but never at the expense of clarity
+ Controls are limited but astutely judged for useful tweaks

- Not as flexible as the big boys
- The cramped markings are murder to read even off stage

Just gorgeous – this has to be the ultimate compact reverb pedal

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Boss RV-6 Reverb** (**£129**) has a similar selection of voices to the Immerse, and sounds great for the money, while the **TC Electronic Hall Of Fame** (**£120**) adds the option of storing your own TonePrint preset. But if you want every reverb sound imaginable at your feet, you might need to invest in a **Strymon BigSky** (**£479**)

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Seymour Duncan Andromeda

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Andromeda claims to offer just about every type of delay imaginable in one box, with deep editing on the fly – this may take a while. **SYD EDWARDS** gets ambient...

Seymour Duncan's Andromeda delay is the latest salvo in the pickup giant's push into guitar effects, and it may be its best yet. Whaever you imagine your ultimate delay pedal, the Andromeda has probably beaten you to it. Alongside the common time, feedback and mix controls you also get saturation, tone and modulation, plus tap tempo and dynamic expression, which lets you to control the saturation, modulation or mix by varying your pick attack.

A six-position selector allows you to choose either analogue or digital-sounding versions of many delay types, which can be further tweaked then saved as presets accessed via MIDI, or the unit's tap footswitch. You can also back up your sounds and download firmware updates via USB.

In Use

Once you've got to grips with it, it's clear the Andromeda can cover almost any delay eventuality. Though it has stereo outputs, the sound is very impressive in the mono mode that most of us will use live. Available delay time is 50ms to five seconds and you can set delay times on the fly with the tap control, with four selectable divisions of the beat to assist further if required.

Setting it to 'analog/normal' mode and a delay time of 400ms, we tweak the saturation for a crunchy lo-fi effect, then add a little modulation to give a subtle chorusing as the delays blend with the original signal. A twang on the low E string sounds as spacious as a distant church bell in a Tuscan valley, while the tone dials in the right amount of cut, from very muted to a bright analogue-style repeat.

Switching to the digital mode brightens things further, with high tone settings slicing through, but regaining a more analogue-style warmth at lower settings. Various other modes, including reverse and ping-pong are a useful addition, but to our ears, the unit's primary strength is its sheer quality of sound. Once you like what you hear, simply save it using the buttons below the display or MIDI – all very easy and intuitive.

One of the smaller buttons is a trails on/off switch, giving you the option of allowing a natural decay when bypassing, or an abrupt cut off. The dynamic expression controls, meanwhile, are a way to make functions such as modulation, saturation and mix sensitive to your picking dynamics. Hard picking lowers the delay level, but allows it to come through in softer moments.

Want exactly the opposite? Want this function on the modulation? No problem. The rotary threshold control lights up in an appropriate colour to let you know exactly how much – and of what effect – you're manipulating, too. There's an awful lot going on in this little box...

> A twang on the low E string sounds as spacious as a distant church bell in a Tuscan valley

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The king of high end delay is the **Strymon TimeLine** (**£427**) – it costs a pretty penny, but there's very little it can't do. In compact form, **Earthquaker Devices' Space Spiral** (**£205**) is great for out-there effects, while **Line 6**'s **DL-4** (**£185**) is 20 years old but still beloved by many

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Very versatile with a small footprint
+ Top notch sound quality
- Hard to read some of the smaller script under limited lighting

A comprehensive, fabulous sounding, feature-packed delay that's suitable for all applications

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Seymour Duncan Andromeda

- **PRICE** £285
- **DESCRIPTION** Programmable digital delay pedal
- **CONTROLS** Delay type, feedback, delay time, tap value, saturation, tone, modulation, mix
- **FEATURES** Trails on/off, dynamic expression (in various modes).
- **DIMENSIONS** 142 x 130 x 54mm
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550033 **www.seymourduncan.com**

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

House Of Tone JazzHouse & E-Type pickups

The British winder joins the offset renaissance. **RICHARD PURVIS** tries out some Jazz and Jag pickups with pedigree...

KEY FEATURES

House Of Tone JazzHouse

- **PRICE** £65 each (£130 set) with lifetime warranty
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-coil Jazzmaster pickups. Made in UK
- **SPECS** Alnico V (neck) and alnico II (bridge) magnets, 42AWG formvar wire, lightly wax-potted

House Of Tone E-Type

- **PRICE** £65 each (£130 set) with lifetime warranty
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-coil Jaguar pickups. Made in UK
- **SPECS** Alnico V (neck) and alnico II (bridge) magnets, 42AWG formvar wire, lightly wax-potted
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **houseoftonepickups.com**

British pickup making is in rude health these days, and Chester firm House Of Tone is near the top of the pile. Its latest designs are replacement pups for two guitars that often need them: Fender's Jazzmaster and Jaguar – several versions of which were fitted with rather spiky sounding pickups.

House Of Tone keeps things close to vintage specs for this JazzHouse and E-Type (nice) sets, using 42AWG formvar wire and, in both cases, alnico V at the neck and alnico II at the bridge. The Jag pickups both have a DC resistance of 6.5k, while the Jazzmaster units have been wound slightly hotter and read 7k (neck) and 7.2k (bridge). Our review samples have all been lightly wax-potted, but you can specify otherwise.

In Use

First up for transplant is an American Vintage Jazzmaster, and our initial impression is that the JazzHouses sound almost identical to the Seymour Duncan Antiquity IIs they're replacing: smooth and plummy at the neck, rich and aggressive at the bridge, overflowing with clucky sweetness in the middle position.

It soon becomes clear, however, that these have a touch more clarity and definition than the Duncans. Played clean through a Blackface, too shrill, these are zingy, chiming pickups and no mistake.

With surf-style reverb and tremolo, the bridge unit fires out enough twang to bring down a seagull, but the phasey jangle in the middle position can sound even more abrasive if you're not careful. Still, it only takes the slightest tweak of the tone knob to take the edge off, and clean chords will still cut through with that timeless Jaguar charm.

> The JazzHouse is an archetypal Jazzmaster voice that excels at gently percussive single notes

with a pinkie on standby to nudge back the guitar's tone control if needed, it's an archetypal Jazzmaster voice that excels at gently percussive single notes and, predictably, sounds wonderful for expressive lead lines with a Klon-style overdrive.

Jaguars tend to offer a bright and cheeky short-scale character instead of tonal depth, and the E-Types make no attempt to fight this tendency. Despite the use of alnico II in the bridge unit to stop things getting

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Other UK winders eager to upgrade your JM or Jag include **Mojo Pickups** (**from £45**) and **The Creamery** (**from £57**). There are plenty of American alternatives, notably from Lollar and Novak, as well as the excellent **Seymour Duncan Antiquity** models (**from £108**)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ JazzHouse pickups are clear and articulate without being brittle
+ E-Type neck unit is clear and bell-like, even on the rhythm circuit
– Some may prefer a softier, spongier tone than the JazzHouse
– E-Type high notes can be a little piercing in the middle position

About as good as it gets for vintage Jazzmaster and Jaguar tone

9/10

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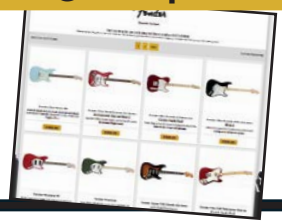

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Featured..

£459

Faith Naked Venus Cutaway Electro Acoustic

Solid Engelmann Top. Solid Mahogany Back and Sides. Natural Finish.

£845

Faith Hi Gloss Venus Cutaway Electro Acoustic

Solid Engelmann Top. Solid Rosewood Back and Sides. Gloss Finish.

£835

Faith Venus Blood Moon Cutaway Electro Acoustic

Solid 'AAA' Grade Indonesian Trembeso Top, Back and Sides. Gloss Finish.

New

£1,036

Fender FSR Classic 69 Telecaster Pink Paisley

Made in Japan. Maple Fingerboard. Fantastic Paisley finish. C profile Neck.

£1,299

Gibson EB-3

Circa 1972. All original. Fantastic condition. Big Vintage Sound. With Non Original Hard Case. More photos online.

Pre-owned

£2,499

Fender Custom Shop Relic '64 Jazz Bass

Made in 1999. Fantastic Relic'd finish. All original. Comes with hard case.

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£2,999

Fender 1962 Precision Bass

Lots of original parts. Fantastic tone. Extensive Description and Photos online.

Beautiful!

£2,499

D'Angelico NYS2 New Yorker

Pre-owned: Lawsuit Model. Made in 2006. Mint Condition. With original Hard Case. Stunning finish!

Vintage

£2,499

Gibson 1978 Les Paul Custom

A superb example of Gibsons iconic Les Paul Custom. Made in the USA in 1978. Fantastic Condition. More info Online.

Vintage

£1,299

Fender 'The Strat' 1980

Pre-owned: Very collectable. 9 Pickup Combinations. X1 Bridge Pickup. Great Condition. More Photos Online.

1979

£975

Guild B302-F Fretless Bass

Fantastic condition. Very rare! 100% original. With Guild Hard case. More information and photos online.

New

£2,869

Gretsch G6120-59 LTV QM LTD

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Taylor GS Mini-e Bass

Taylor's successful GS Mini range gets a four-string bass. **GARETH MORGAN** finds out if small is beautiful...

Taylor's travel and beginner-focused GS Mini range has been a massive boon for the Californian company, but this four-string version is not your average acoustic bass. Because Taylor was determined to stick to the existing GS Mini parameters, it meant the designers had to work with a really short scale length, namely 597mm (23.5 inches). This also meant developing new strings for it. Taylor hooked up with D'Addario to create a new configuration: a nylon core encased in a phosphor bronze wrap wire, and these are the only strings that work with the Mini Bass' scale. It's a compromise of course, but one that's outweighed by the benefits.

It's not just the strings where the GS Mini Bass breaks from the norm, however. The traditional-style ebony bridge has new dual-prong polycarbonate pins. The strings are threaded between the prongs which, in turn, securely anchors them, creating an essentially self-locking system, but one that still makes string changes a doddle. This system also enhances the sound quality as it enables a more gradual string bend over the white micarta saddle.

The top is Sitka spruce, with sapele back and sides, and while there's been some modification to the GS Mini's internal bracing to make it more bass-oriented, it isn't a radical change. The heel, neck and headstock are also sapele – the latter divided from the ebony fingerboard by a Nubone nut. The 'board itself has 20 small nickel frets. Plugged in sounds are handled by Taylor's ES-B system, with controls for volume, tone and the onboard tuner inside the soundhole.

Balance-wise, the Mini Bass is rather headstock-heavy. But, as it only weighs 1.75kgs (3.86lbs), this doesn't cause any problems in seated position that can't be solved by a gently positioned forearm, and it's a similar story around your neck.

> The scale is short enough for guitarists to feel comfortable, and for bassists to enjoy

In Use

Make no mistake about it, this is a small bass. The scale is short enough for guitarists to feel comfortable, and for bassists to enjoy flying around the dinky little fretboard. Sure, there's a slight toy-like feel but that pales into insignificance thanks to how good the GS Mini Bass sounds unplugged. Taylor and D'Addario have done an excellent job on the strings – they're taut enough for a bass-like vibe but smooth and easy to play. While not huge and booming, there's more than enough bottom end for a convincing bass thud and a decent growl, replete with harmonics and projection. It's clean and solid in the midrange, too, while treble realisation is pleasingly natural, imbuing thinner strings with more than enough in the cut and bite department without rendering them overly clanky. Pretty perfect for sunny day, back garden jamming.

It's not bad plugged in either. Tone set flat, it's pretty much the acoustic sound in amplified form, albeit with a tell-tale zing as your note resonates (especially on thinner strings). It's not a one-trick pony, however. With the tone turned clockwise you get a spiky, more aggressive animal – albeit one that retains the woody acoustic vibe – but cut the tone completely and it veers into upright bass territory. A real bonus to an already impressive instrument.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Delivers a surprisingly convincing bass tone from a small package
+ Really well put together and comfortable to play
- It only works with one set of strings
- Not the cheapest compact option

The GS Mini Bass is a highly portable option for guitarists or bassists that's great fun to play

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

For something even smaller, check out the **Kala U-Bass** (**£509**). This 533mm (21") scale belter uses custom polyurethane strings which sound in the same register as a regular solidbody. The **Traveller TB4P** (**£425**) bass is a down-sized solidbody offering that's 895mm (35.25") long in total. If you fancy a full-size acoustic bass, look no further than **Washburn's AB-10** (**£579**), it's a spruce-topped, thin-bodied, single-cutaway acoustic bass that we like a lot

KEY FEATURES

Taylor GS Mini-e Bass

- **DESCRIPTION** Mini electro-acoustic bass. Made in Mexico
- **PRICE** £827 (inc padded hard gigbag)
- **BUILD** Sitka spruce top, layered sapele back and sides, sapele neck with 20 small nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard, Taylor 100/200 tuners and ebony bridge. Chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Taylor ES-B electronics powered by 2x 3V lithium batteries, with behind-the-saddle piezo pickup and chromatic tuner
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone, tuner on/off switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, same price
- **FINISHES** Natural varnish
- **SCALE LENGTH** 597mm (23.5")
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at 1st fret, 23mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 11.5mm at nut, 18mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** (kg/lbs) 1.75/3.86
- **CONTACT** Taylor Guitars Europe +31 020 667 6030 **www.taylorguitars.com**

PRECIOUS JEMS

Steve Vai's famous signature model is 30 years old. TONY BACON charts the birth of this most individual of instruments...

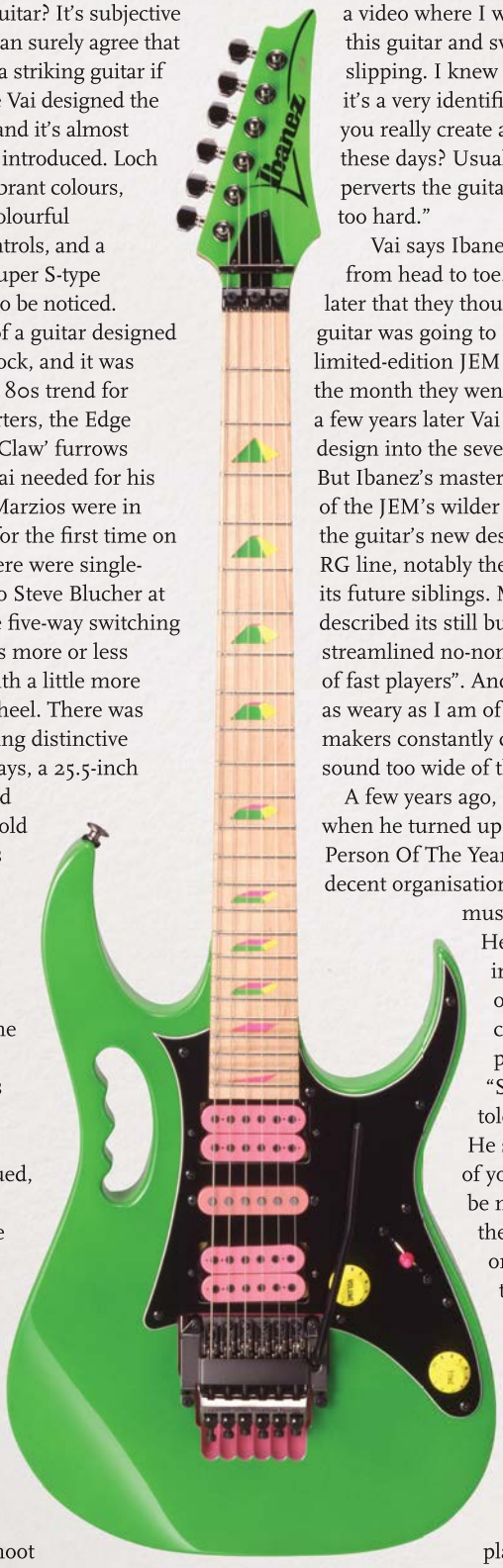
TONY BACON

Tony Bacon writes books about guitars and guitarists: more at tonybacon.co.uk. His latest is *The Bass Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of the electric bass guitar

What is a beautiful guitar? It's subjective of course, but we can surely agree that the Ibanez JEM is a striking guitar if nothing else. Steve Vai designed the JEM with Ibanez, and it's almost exactly 30 years since it was introduced. Loch Ness green, among other vibrant colours, with matching headstock, colourful contrasting pickups and controls, and a 'Monkey Grip' hole in the Super S-type basswood body – it's made to be noticed.

It had all the hallmarks of a guitar designed for Vai-flavoured extreme rock, and it was one of the highlights of the 80s trend for hot-rodded S-types. For starters, the Edge locking vibrato had 'Lion's Claw' furrows behind the bridge, which Vai needed for his generous pull-ups. The DiMarzios were in HSH formation, probably for the first time on a production guitar, and there were single-coil in-betweeners thanks to Steve Blucher at DiMarzio, who tweaked the five-way switching circuit. The maple neck was more or less Ibanez's thin Ultra style, with a little more chunk and a cutaway neck heel. There was a maple fingerboard featuring distinctive 'Disappearing Pyramid' inlays, a 25.5-inch scale, and 24 frets, scalloped from the 21st upward. Vai told me the scalloped board was inspired by Billy Sheehan's Yamaha basses, and by a guitar that Yngwie Malmsteen once showed him. "Yngwie said: 'With these, you can really grab the note by the balls.' Brilliant! Exactly right, because that's what it feels like."

"I put all these elements into the guitar," Vai continued, "And I had this instinct they're probably going to be used by other companies. I wouldn't be surprised, because some of them are pretty practical ideas, you know? So I wanted to put one thing into this guitar that I knew no one would do, because it would be too outrageous. So I put that Monkey Grip in it. Also, I was about to shoot a video where I wanted to be able to grab this guitar and swing it around without it slipping. I knew no one else would do this: it's a very identifiable feature. How else can you really create an identifiable instrument these days? Usually, if you try to do that, it perverts the guitar, it looks like you're trying too hard."



Vai says Ibanez thought he was crazy from head to toe. "They didn't tell me 'til later that they thought there was no way this guitar was going to sell." In fact, all 777 of the limited-edition JEM model were sold within the month they went on sale back in 1987, and a few years later Vai and Ibanez developed the design into the seven-string Universe models. But Ibanez's masterstroke was to remove some of the JEM's wilder excesses and apply most of the guitar's new design benefits to its revised RG line, notably the new RG550 of 1987 and its future siblings. More recently, Ibanez described its still buoyant RG style as "the streamlined no-nonsense all-time favourite of fast players". And while I'm sure you're as weary as I am of the sales hype that guitar makers constantly chuck at us, that doesn't sound too wide of the mark.

A few years ago, Bob Dylan gave a speech when he turned up to receive an award for Person Of The Year from MusiCares – a decent organisation that aims to look after musicians down on their luck. He talked with wit and insight about his songs, other songwriters, his critics, and more, and at one point he mentioned beauty. "Sam Cooke said this when told he had a beautiful voice. He said: 'Well, that's very kind of you, but voices ought not to be measured by how pretty they are. Instead they matter only if they convince you that they are telling the truth.' Think about that the next time you're listening to a singer," Bob said. You might also think about that the next time you look at a beautiful instrument. Or the next time you actually play your guitar.

© Getty Images

Vai playing his original JEM on stage with David Lee Roth in 1987

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'54 GIBSON ES-175D

The ES-175D added an extra pickup to Gibson's most affordable hollowbody jazz box, adding versatility to this stage-ready semi-acoustic...

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Gibson had already established itself as the go-to guitar brand for jazz musicians, with high–end model offerings like the ES-300 and ES-350. But these models were expensive, and Gibson wanted to broaden the scope of who could afford to play its guitars.

Enter the ES-175 in 1949, with an all-laminate construction that not only kept the cost of production down, but also helped to manage feedback at louder volumes. The '175' was a reference to the guitar's sticker price of $175.

Four years later, Gibson released a two-pickup version called the ES-175D. Prior to its release, buyers could only get a double-pickup version of the guitar by custom order. This listing features one of the earliest production ES-175D models, being one of only 129 guitars shipped in 1954.

As such, this ES-175D is equipped with a lot of features that would eventually be changed later in the decade. For example, the two single–coil P-90 pickups from the earlier models would be replaced with PAF humbuckers in 1957, and the standard trapeze tailpiece would be exchanged for a more visually interesting unit.

Since the modern ES-175D reissues adhere to the specs of the '59 iteration, this particular guitar listed is a rare bird, indeed.

The full-hollowbody Gibson is famous for its deep, rich and resonant tone, and prized for its exceptional sustain. It was also the first Gibson guitar ever to feature the now-iconic and razor-sharp Florentine cutaway.

The hollowbody Gibson is famous for its full, rich and resonant tone, and prized for its exceptional sustain

Widely regarded as a jazz guitar – and one of the best and most iconic at that – the ES-175D has welcomed some notable rock players into its dedicated camp, as well. Steve Howe of Yes fame worked with Gibson on a signature model that was released in 2006.

The price for this particular guitar is on the higher end of the spectrum at just under £5,000, but it is all-original and in good condition, with only a few nicks and dings. There is a small crack in the headstock and the wood around the input jack is fragile, but the seller assures that it has been handled with care.

VITAL STATISTICS

1954 Gibson ES-175D

- **PRICE GUIDE** £4,995
- **YEAR** 1954
- **MANUFACTURER:** Gibson
- **TYPE** Hollowbody archtop
- **REVERB SELLER** Nick's Guitars reverb.com/uk/shop/nicksguitars
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/item/4750592-gibson-es-175-d-1954-natural-blonde

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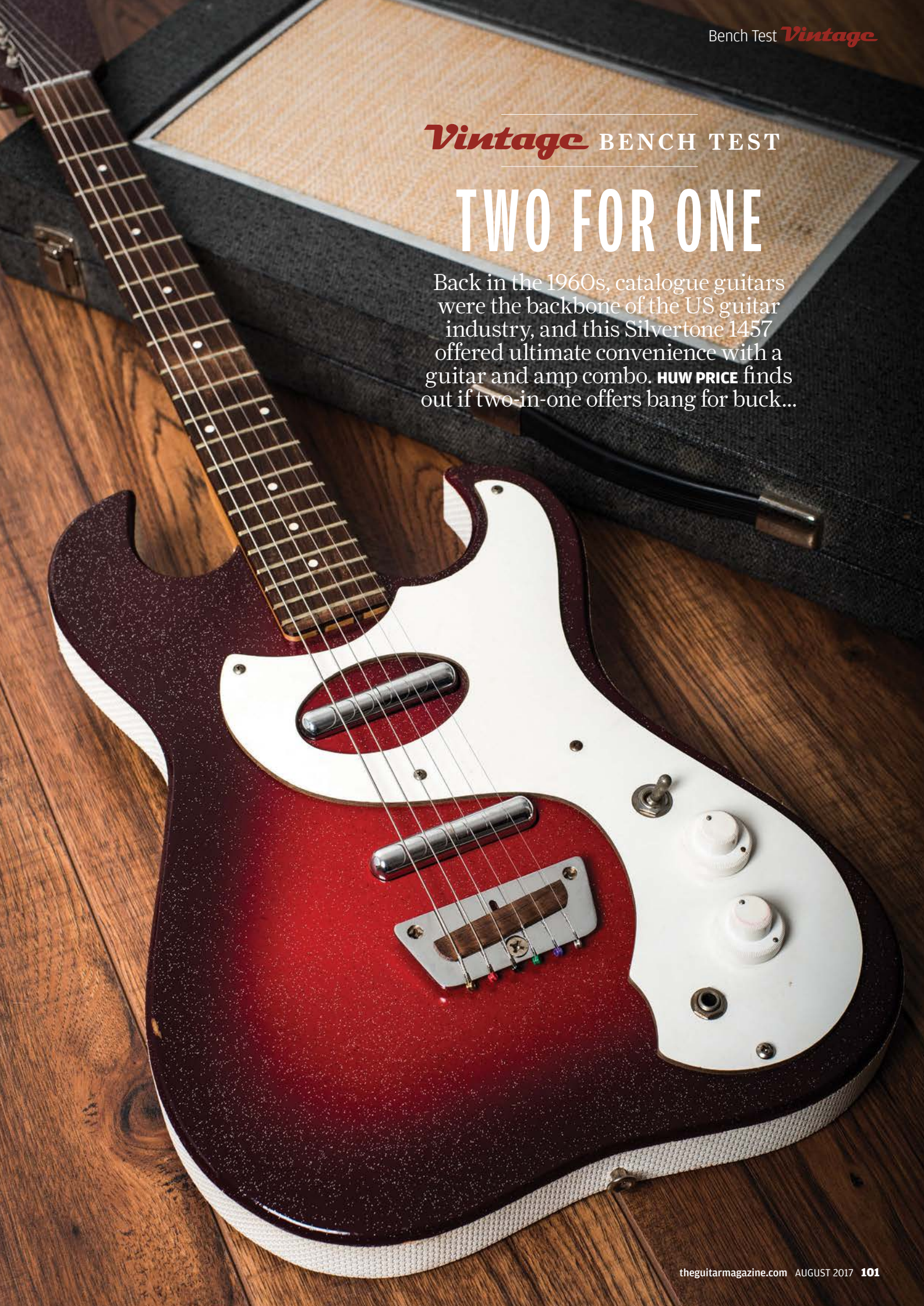
TWO FOR ONE

Back in the 1960s, catalogue guitars were the backbone of the US guitar industry, and this Silvertone 1457 offered ultimate convenience with a guitar and amp combo. **HUW PRICE** finds out if two-in-one offers bang for buck...



Above **The Danelectro rosewood bridge could be moved around for intonation adjustment**
Opposite top left **Like most Danelectro guitars, the hardboard body is held together by textured vinyl binding tape**
Opposite top right **The handsome Redburst finish is given a sparkly depth thanks to a liberal amount of glitter flecks**
Opposite bottom right **This may say Silvertone on the headstock, but all the usual Danelectro features are present, including the dual-concentric knobs**

Next time you're out shopping, pop into Argos and flick through the laminated pages of its famous catalogue. Inside, you'll find a few budget guitar and amp packages aimed at beginners, but they won't be anywhere near as cool as this 1964-'66 Silvertone 1457 guitar and case/amp combo, which was sold through the famous Sears mail-order catalogue.

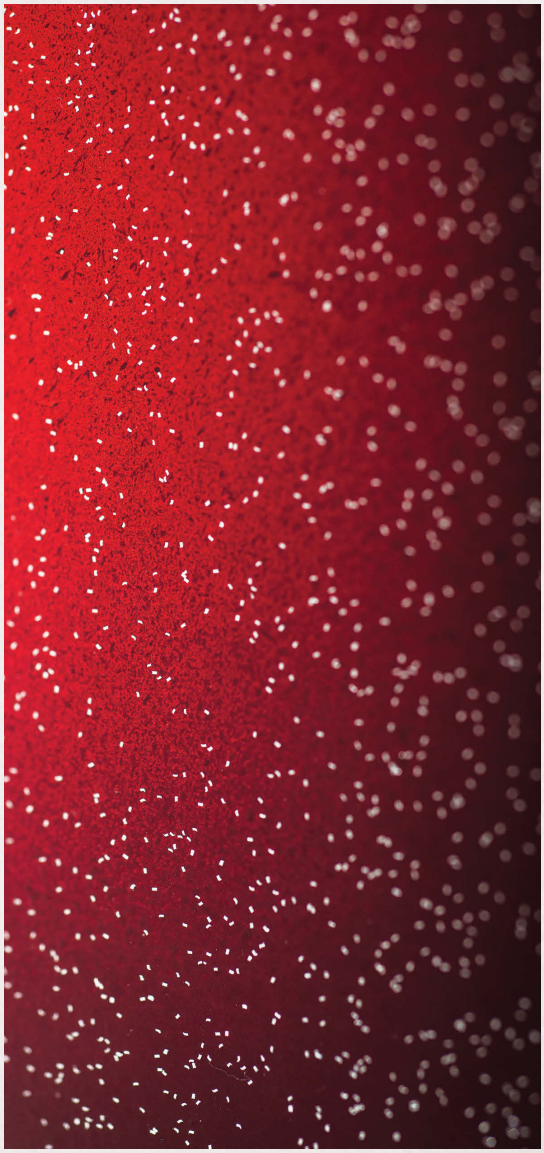
Taking advantage of the explosion of guitar music, Sears commissioned various manufacturers to produce guitars and amps for its catalogue under the Silvertone brand – these included famous names such as Harmony and Kay, but in this instance we have a guitar made by Danelectro, and an amplifier built into a hard case, probably manufactured by Valco.

Sears described this compact combo as "our finest all-in-one guitar outfit" and when new, budding guitarists would have found a 45rpm 'how-to-play' record, some beginner charts and a pick inside in the case. There would also have been a wedge-shaped tremolo footswitch covered in the same vinyl as the hardboard case, but none of these items remain with this example.

That aside, the condition of both the guitar and amplifier/case is borderline remarkable considering that they were manufactured between 1964 and 1966. The date codes on the amplifier control pots correspond with late '64, so we'd guess towards the middle of the production run since these were made in large numbers and parts would have been used up quickly. The 1457 replaced the black-finished but otherwise identical 1449 that was produced during 1963 and 1964.

The guitar is exactly how it was when it originally left the factory... it's almost like a NOS guitar

The guitar is exactly how it was when it originally left the factory, and aside from a handful of light belt buckle marks and a small chip off the lower bout, it's almost like an NOS guitar. Curiously, the screw head adjacent to the switch is rusty, but all the others look shiny and new.



Although described as a 'Redburst' the colour is more of a purple burst overlaid with silver glitter. Danelectro's approach to glitter application was about as discerning as drunk in a kebab shop at 3am. Indeed, glitter is absolutely everywhere – from the exposed wood sides of the neck heel to the back of the neck and even the headstock. It looks fabulous, of course, but it does make the back of the neck feel less than sleek.

All the classic Dano features are present, including dual-concentric knobs, a rosewood bridge wedge that can slide and twist for intonation adjustments and six-in-a-box tuners that work backwards. Best of all there are not just one but two 'lipstick' pickups because this is, after all, the more upmarket package.

The amp is so clean and original that it's still running on Silvertone-branded valves. The lineup includes two 12AX7s, plus a 6V6 and a 6X4 rectifier, and all four can be viewed through circular cutouts in the amp panel. The circuit is a fairly simple single-ended affair with the smallest output transformer we've ever seen, but there's onboard tremolo with speed and strength controls that wobble the bias of the input side of the 12AX7 triode. >

Above **The headstock is one of the few points of difference between a Danelectro and a Silvertone build**
Above top **Rather than an adjustable truss rod, the neck is equipped with twin steel beams for reinforcement**
Above middle **The glitter has been applied with reckless abandon**
Opposite right **Dano's six-in-a-box tuners work backwards**

KEY FEATURES

Silvertone 1457

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-hollow electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £799 (inc amp/case)
- **BUILD** Plywood body with hardboard front and back plates, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, aluminium nut, dot markers, 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Danelectro 6-in-a-box tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Original lipstick single-coil pickups, volume, dual-concentric volume and tone controls, 3-way pickup selector switch
- **FINISH** Redburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 635mm/25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.85kg/6.2lbs

This amp runs on 110 volts, so it needs a step down transformer. Although when we first encountered this amp it had a two-prong mains plug, a properly grounded mains cable with a three-pin plug has since been fitted. Originality extremists may be interested to know that the original plug and cable remains safely inside the case should they prefer to dice with death by reinstalling it.

Most of the period pictures show the case standing upright and open. For stability there's a locking metal bracket at one end of the case and you could use it flat on the floor too. Positioning the case upright places the "big eight-inch speaker" closer to ear height. The amp probably struggles to push four watts through this ceramic Jensen – date-stamped week 44 of 1964.

In Use

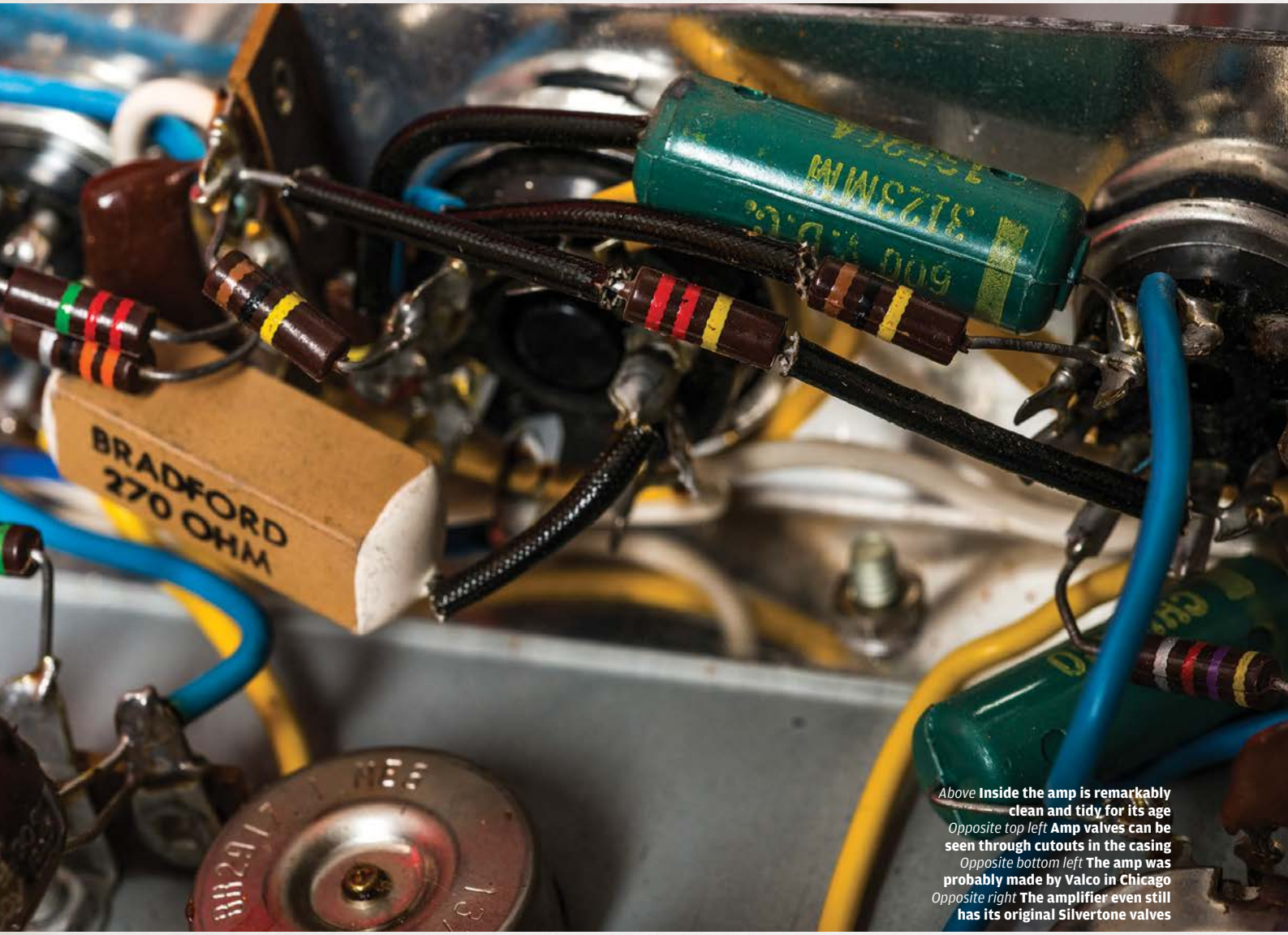
Just as the bumblebee is the most unlikely of flying insects, Danelectro guitars shouldn't really work. A sandwich of construction-grade plywood and hardboard wouldn't strike you as a toneful combination, but almost invariably they're chimey, resonant instruments. Then again, the neck is maple with a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, so it's not all cheap stuff!

The amp is so clean and original that it's still running on Silvertone-branded valves

However, nobody ever bothered to sand the rosewood and you can actually see the marks from when the fingerboard was cut on a bandsaw in places. Danelectro's approach to fret dressing was similar, with these having been levelled, but never crowned or polished. That said, this guitar is moreishly playable with a slinky and buzz free action and stable tuning.

The unplugged tone is closer to that of an acoustic than a solidbody. It's fat, deep, forward in the mids and rings nicely through the treble. The electronics need some cleaning and freeing up after a long period of disuse, so things are initially confusing. The larger knobs at the base are individual volume controls and >

Above **A straw basketweave grille cloth allows the Jensen speaker to project from the case**
Below left **A locking metal bracket is included so that you can stand the amp part of the case up for better sound projection**
Below right **The amp circuit obviously has to be compact, and it features the smallest output transformer we've ever seen**



Above **Inside the amp is remarkably clean and tidy for its age**
Opposite top left **Amp valves can be seen through cutouts in the casing**
Opposite bottom left **The amp was probably made by Valco in Chicago**
Opposite right **The amplifier even still has its original Silvertone valves**

KEY FEATURES

Silvertone Amp/Case Combo

- **BUILD** Single-channel, hand-wired valve combo, built into hard guitar case. Made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 4W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7, 1x 6V6, 1x 6X4
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input jacks, volume, tone, speed, strength, tremolo footswitch input
- **SPEAKER** 1x Jensen C8T
- **DIMENSIONS** 990 x 365 x 90mm
- **WEIGHT** 8kg/17lbs
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 01792 654840 **www.cranes.co.uk**

the smaller ones are for tone. When the switch behaves, you get neck/both/bridge but the middle setting is both in series rather than parallel. So you get the increased output and midrange associated with a humbucker.

The pickups have an almost hi-fi clarity. The bridge has quack and an endearingly nasal twang while the neck is fatter, woodier and more vocal. Individually both also have a sweet sparkle that even the finest Fender-style single coils would struggle to beat and in series they take on a snarl that can easily overdrive an amp.

For clean and overdriven roots and blues sounds, this guitar is endlessly intriguing and tremendous fun. After an hour or so the switch and controls started behaving better and with a little bit of a cleanup and minor setup work, this would be an outstanding player's guitar.

We wish we could report that the amp is an undiscovered gem – though in a limited way it is pretty good. There's relatively little clean headroom, but the tremolo works really well, it's surprisingly clear sounding and the overdrive provides garage punk and lo-fi blues fun at socially acceptable volume levels.

While the guitar can hold its own with anything when played through a regular amp, it's transformed into a

The pickups have a sweet sparkle that even the finest Fender-style single coils would struggle to beat

period piece through the Silvertone amp. Assuming you already have an amp that you like, the case/amp can almost be regarded as a free gift that you'll enjoy occasionally using at home and in the studio.

Since these all-in-one packages were made for beginners, maybe those who took to playing them traded up quickly, leading to the Silvertones being tucked under the bed and simply forgotten about. Either way, they often look like they haven't seen a lot of action and there are plenty about in excellent condition. This one is priced about right considering what these sell for in the US and the added costs of import and taxes, and you'd struggle to find a better example.

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Vintage COLLECTION

NORMAN'S WISDOM

With 50 years in the business and one of the world's leading guitar collections, Norman Harris is the proprietor of a destination guitar store in Tarzana, California, which is frequented by A-list musicians and vintage obsessives alike. Here, the man who supplied the guitars for Spinal Tap holds court and introduces us to some choice pieces...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** Photography **Eleanor Jane**

It might be world-famous, but you won't find Norman's Rare Guitars jostling for position with the souvenir shops that line the star-embedded sidewalks of Hollywood. Join Highway 101 and travel about 15 miles north west you'll find yourself in Tarzana, a neighbourhood in the San Fernando Valley established on the site of a ranch formerly owned by novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs and named after his most famous creation, the jungle hero Tarzan. Only in America.

Norman Harris' store resides in the corner of a nondescript strip mall sandwiched between Ventura Boulevard and the freeway. When we arrive, the sky is still bruised from a weekend storm that saw years of drought conditions in Southern Californian alleviated in a matter of hours. Inside we find shelter and guitars. New guitars, used guitars and vintage guitars. Hundreds of them. And that doesn't even include the really good stuff in the back. We ask the boss how this whole thing got started in the first place and he winds the clock back to late 1960s Miami...

"Originally I was a Hammond organ player," Norman recalls. "My band had two guys that doubled on guitar and bass, and neither one had a bass, so I volunteered >

2008 Gibson Custom Joe Bonamassa Les Paul prototype

"Joe, in my opinion, is the greatest blues guitar player alive today. I think he is the Clapton of this era. I've known Joe since he was 12 years old and he's like family to me. We've done a lot of trading and he's bought a number of great instruments from me. This we had for all of about five minutes! It sold instantaneously. This was the guitar that got his whole relationship with Gibson started. This was the prototype and they gave this guitar to Joe, going 'maybe we'll build a few instruments, we'll see how it goes, we don't know if we'll sell any.' I think they've sold about 10,000 of Joe's signature instruments so far. This one started it all and it's the prototype. Joe has the number one production model, his dad has number two and his manager Roy has number three."

1951 Stromberg Master 400 (above)
"Probably the two prime boutique builders back in the day were Stromberg and D'Angelico. Stromberg probably had even less of an output than D'Angelico and he's a little less known. This guitar is 19 inches, blonde. Both of those makers made custom guitars for the top players of the day from Oscar Moore to whoever. There was so much more workmanship in an archtop guitar. It really is an amazing piece of art."

1954 Gretsch 6130 Round Up (opposite)
"It's a very cool guitar. One of the very first of its kind. Some of the parts are cleaner, reissue parts as the originals are very oxidised, but we have the original parts."

to go buy one 'cause I figured maybe I could learn to play. I bought a very early Jazz Bass, and everybody in town wanted to buy it from me. The light went on and I just said, this is something that I can do. We weren't making a lot of money playing and I figured I could subsidise my income by buying and selling instruments. I came out [to Los Angeles] in 1970. I had a band with this guy Bobby Caldwell. Little Richard's brother managed our band; we came out like everybody else with the hopes of trying to make it big. In the meantime, my plan B became my plan A."

"Chris Guest knew I had a lot of cool stuff. He wanted to set it up that Nigel Tufnel was a guitar collector"

Only In Theatres

After a period spent trading guitars out of his home, by early 1975, the first incarnation of Norman's Rare Guitars was open in nearby Reseda. The following year, when actor and customer David Carradine approached Norman to rent period-correct instruments for his Woody Guthrie biopic, *Bound For Glory*, it kick-started a relationship with the movie industry that saw Harris supply guitars that would be immortalised in celluloid in the likes of *The Last Waltz*, *Back To The Future* and *This Is Spinal Tap*.

Given that any guitar journalist worth his or her salt has a borderline religious devotion to *Spinal Tap*, we have to ask how Norman's contribution came about. "Chris Guest was a customer of mine for a number of years," Harris reveals. "He was kind of a folkie – actually *A Mighty Wind* is closer to what Chris Guest is than *This Is Spinal Tap*! – but he said, 'We're gonna do this movie, it's a mockumentary spoof on this rock band, and we'd really like to have a lot of cool vintage instruments as part of the movie'.

"He gave one magazine interview that had the greatest line ever, he said 'Spinal Tap is great because we play loud. These jazz groups, they play so low that you have to take their word for it that they are good.' I love that line. Chris was more into the acoustic >

1957 Gibson Les Paul Custom (above)
"This is one of the cleanest ones on the face of the earth. It still has the hang-tag that says 'Fretless Wonder' because of the very small frets. Three PAFs... a fantastic guitar. A piece of time notated in an instrument. People were using flatwound strings back in the day and it allowed people to have a very low action. Now people are bending a lot more and they want to have a little more fret."

1965 Fender Stratocaster (opposite and overleaf)
"This is an early '65 in Lake Placid Blue with a green guard, it's got the pearl dots. It's a really nice example. It's not mint but I'd call it an 8.75 out of 10. Very clean, straight, 100 percent, just a very nice example and it happens to be a great instrument as well."

instruments, but he knew that I had a lot of really cool electric stuff. He kind of wanted to set it up that Nigel Tufnel was a guitar collector. The band had done really well and peaked and the next thing you know they are opening for a puppet show at a Holiday Inn."

While The Guitar Dealer Gently Weeps

If you have spent years buying and selling guitars, along the way a gem or two will inevitably have slipped through your fingers. Norman's 'one that got away' just happens to be an instrument that was used to change the course of popular culture.

"There's a lot of dumb things I've done over the years but this is probably the dumbest," Norman grimaces. "When I first met George Harrison, he'd gone from playing Gretsch guitars to Gibsons and Fenders and stuff like that. There was a time when he wasn't using his Country Gentleman anymore and he offered to possibly trade it against this sunburst Les Paul that I had.

"Firstly, he was the first really big star I'd ever dealt with, and I didn't figure anybody was ever going to believe I was sitting next to George Harrison. I had trouble believing I was sitting next to him. I figured people were just going to call me a liar. And I could have had that guitar, which was probably the guitar he was associated with most. He used that guitar a lot. This was before the days that techs were bringing people different guitars for every tune. It was my bad that I didn't take it in trade. That was probably the biggest one that ever got away. But there's been a lot of them. When it comes to doing stupid things, I'm right up there with some of the stupidest people I've ever met!"

Fast-forward five decades or so and, like many vintage guitar dealers, Norman is grappling with the challenges presented by CITES and is hopeful that there can be a pragmatic solution. "It's definitely hampering business and it's really unfortunate," he admits. "I'm kind of with them when it comes down to not wanting to cut down new trees, in order to give the forests chance to recoup and recover. But instruments that were made 50 years ago? I really see no point in trying to hamper business.

"What are they going to do, come into people's houses and destroy instruments? Are they going to chop up someone's Steinway piano? I'm not for killing elephants, I'm not for any of that kind of stuff. But if it happened 50 or 100 years ago then an instrument >

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shouldn't be destroyed because of it. To just destroy it makes no sense to me at all. People should be allowed to do business and you shouldn't destroy antiques because they contain certain products. I'm hoping that common sense will come into play and they'll get this all worked out so it's not just crippling people's business."

Collector's Choice

Norman recently turned 68 years old and he says that this has put him in "a different mindspace". As a result he's now prepared to part with certain instruments he's been holding onto for years, although there are still new guitars coming into his possession all the time. This is evidenced by dozens of battered cases that arrived that very morning – the spoils of a buying spree at the SoCal World Guitar Show in Orange County just a couple of days before our visit.

Harris has sage words of advice for others who have been bitten by the vintage guitar bug: "This is what I tell everybody who is buying guitars: don't buy a guitar because I like it, or somebody on a forum tells you it's great. If you are going to play it, you have gotta love it. You can buy something that's really cool that's gonna be collectible, but if you love it you'll get use out of it and it's functional art. If it's something you are gonna buy because some guy on a forum told you to... that's a bad reason to buy a guitar."

He also argues that vintage guitars are not overpriced in comparison to other major collectible items. "When you think about coins, baseball cards, whatever... guitars are still not really overpriced," he states. "You might get a really nice violin for seven figures but it might not even be the best of the best. Here, you can buy the best of the best for way less money. There's more people that play guitar than play violin. A lot of these things, they're not making any more of them. More than likely the great examples will keep increasing in value. I think it's still a very valid investment – the only thing is you have to know what you are buying, do your homework, get a great example, something that plays great and sounds great. The bonus to everything is that you get to play it!"

As he's already hinted, Norman doesn't have much time for received wisdom and always encourages people to make up their own minds: "People might not like me for saying this but on those guitar forums... you have a lot of people that are self-proclaimed experts on things. They've probably not seen very many guitars. But they've read this and they've read that and they say, 'You don't need a Stratocaster unless you've got one with nine screws in the pickguard.' It's just nonsense that has no meaning."

"The truth of the matter is that one guitar may work really well for somebody and the next person who picks it up, based on the way they play, whether they hit the strings harder or lighter, it may have a whole different thing. I've heard acoustic guitars sound fantastic with somebody and the next guy picks it up and it's not so great.

"It's a personalised thing. Don't take the advice of all these knuckleheads on the forums that they basically spew because they've got nothing better to do. Use your own judgement, your own ear and your own hands. Don't listen to what somebody tells you that you need. You need what you feel good on, and what sounds good to your ear."

***Confessions Of A Vintage Guitar Dealer: The Memoirs Of Norman Harris* is available now via Hal Leonard and includes a foreward by Richie Sambora and a preface by Joe Bonamassa.**

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *The Guitar Magazine*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for a future issue

1966 Fender Jazz Bass (opposite bottom)
"That's Firemist gold. It's a very unusual guitar that has a bound neck with dots. They only did that for a very brief time. There were several different golds: Aztec, Shoreline, Harvest and Firemist. It's sort of a subjective call as to which one it is, 'cause Firemist was a little more bright and bold where Harvest was a little more subdued. We're calling this Firemist. This is in the vicinity of $30,000, but it's a stunning example and it's something you probably won't see again."

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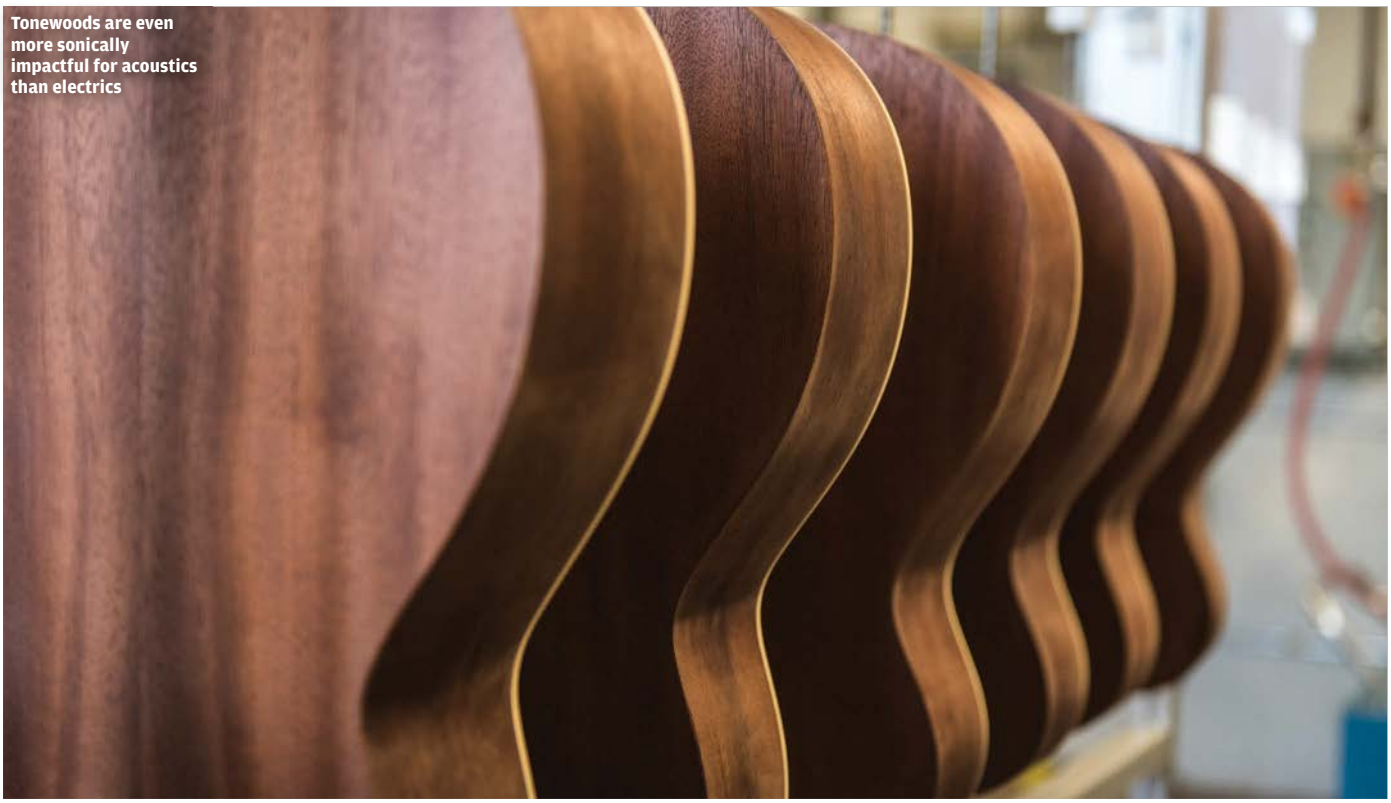

Tonewoods are even more sonically impactful for acoustics than electrics

All about... Tonewoods

'Tone' is a contentious and elusive concept. Few agree on what it is or indeed where comes from. Some say it's in the fingers, others that it's in the pickups or the amp and some say it's all in the wood. **HUW PRICE** has a timber tantrum...

Guitar tone is an all-encompassing thing – from your fingernails to your floorboards – but there's no escaping the fact that the wood your guitar is made from can have an enormous influence on its sound and dynamic response.

This applies to both acoustics and electrics, although not necessarily in equal measure. After all, acoustic guitars are mostly just strings, bone, metal and wood. With electrics you have to consider myriad combinations of pickups, valves, speakers, and electronic components, too.

Wood has been used to produce music for as long as people have been making instruments. Presumably a caveman discovered that banging a piece of dried out wood could produce notes. Later it was found that wood could be used to amplify string vibrations – millennia before the invention of amplifiers and speakers.

In a sense, acoustic guitar soundboards act much like speakers, because they shift air particles to create sound waves when string vibrations set them in motion. Although speakers are driven electronically rather than mechanically, they also create soundwaves.

The crucial difference is that speakers are designed to convert electrical currents into soundwaves without imposing too many of their own sonic characteristics. In contrast soundboards have to generate soundwaves and shape the tonal characteristics of the instrument itself. In other words the soundboard is, to a fairly large extent, the instrument.

You could build a guitar with any type of timber... but some species are more resonant than others

What is tonewood?

All wood resonates, but some species are more resonant than others. Theoretically you could build a guitar with any type of timber, so long as it's stable and sturdy enough – but the sounds that different timbers produce make them more or less suitable for different applications.

A 'tonewood' refers to the types of timbers that are commonly used to build musical instruments. Until recently the timbers used for guitar building were relatively few, but that is changing fast, for a whole variety of reasons.

Back in the day, wealthy acoustic players may have chosen rosewood-bodied guitars or settled for mahogany if money was tight. Similarly a spruce top may have been seen as the best but if you were farming in Oklahoma, a mahogany top would have to do.

These days the variety of timbers used for acoustic and electric guitar making is much wider. What were once regarded as 'cheaper' tonewoods are now prized for their tone and

appearance, and may cost just as much as a guitar made with 'premium' tonewood.

There's now a broader appreciation of each timber's sonic qualities and their suitability for particular playing styles. The adoption of newer and lesser-known tonewoods is driven, in part, by manufacturers trying to find alternatives that are not subject to export restrictions and reduce costs. Players are also finding inspiration from trying new tonewood combinations.

Evaluating tonewood

Although sonic characteristics are attributed to certain types of tonewood, there can be enormous variation even within the same species. Selecting and evaluating tonewood is a key skill for any luthier and larger manufacturers employ people specifically for the task. So how is it done?

When you tap wood, it will produce a note – this is referred to as the 'fundamental frequency' – plus an array of harmonic overtones. These overtones determine whether the wood will sound bassy, bright, complex or midrangey and to what extent. If the note is dull and short in duration, and harmonic overtones are not apparent, it's unlikely to produce a fine sounding instrument.

Experienced guitar builders will also test for the velocity of the sound – the speed at which the wood transmits the received energy. When you consider how string vibrations pass through the saddle into the bridge and then onto the soundboard, it stands to reason that you would want this process to occur as efficiently as possible.

An experienced guitar builder can also tell a lot about the wood simply by looking at the grain. For instance, close annular lines may indicate strength and stiffness in a piece of spruce, and this may allow the builder to use it to make a thinner and lighter soundboard than would be possible when using a wider-grained spruce.

Visual appeal can be important, too, and tonewoods such as spruce, maple, rosewood and koa are often graded from A through AA, AAA, AAAA and master grade. Assessments are made on grain straightness and the absence of run out, knots and blemishes.

Figuring patterns such as medullary rays and bear claw in spruce or bird's eye, quilt, curl and flame in maple are also considered. Fancy figuring may be helpful from a marketing perspective, but it's no guarantee of fine tone.

There is some degree of crossover between acoustic and electric guitars, so let's round this off by tackling some of the most commonly used tonewoods in the guitar world...

Spruce

The most commonly used acoustic soundboard wood comes in several varieties offering variations on velocity and stiffness. This translates into tops with varying degrees of brightness, headroom, transient response times and break-in periods.

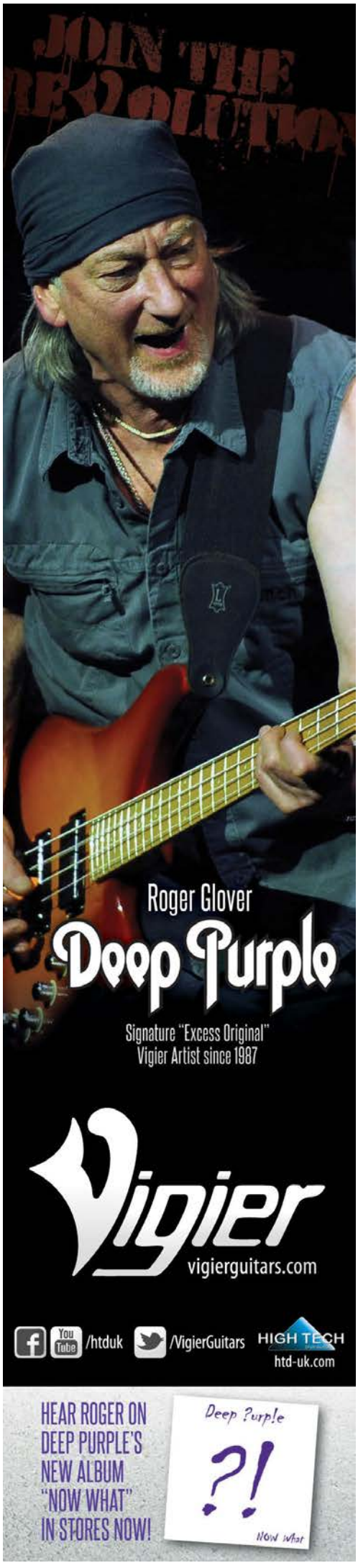
Most of the pre-war US classics were made with Adirondak – aka Appalachian or red spruce – which is the stiffest spruce of all. This yields the highest volume and headroom combined with complex overtones and clarity at all levels.

Sitka has strong fundamentals and direct tone, Engelmann has weaker fundamentals but stronger and more complex overtones at lower volumes, and the increasingly popular lutz is a natural hybrid of Sitka and white spruce with plenty of headroom and volume.

If you ever commission a custom acoustic, you should discuss your preferences and playing style with the builder to establish the variety of spruce that might suit you best.

Red cedar

With its mellower appearance and straight grain, cedar is a very popular soundboard wood for steel string and especially classical guitars. It has higher velocity and greater overtone content than all the spruces, but it's less stiff and clarity can suffer at high volume. >



It can also be weaker along the grain, however, so cedar tends to be used to build smaller-bodied guitars, or coupled with sturdier bracing. George Lowden is known for building fantastic sounding large-bodied, cedar-topped guitars. The tone tends to be mellower and quieter than spruce, but the break in period is much shorter.

Rosewood

Regarded by many luthiers and musicians as the ultimate acoustic tonewood, the use of Brazilian rosewood has been heavily restricted since the 1960s. Indian rosewood took its place but is now facing similar restrictions.

Both are characterised by extremely high velocity, strong lower overtones and strong mids, which provides acoustics with deep and complex bass coupled with strong mids and treble. You may also notice a reverberation effect within the body thanks to rosewood's long sustain and slow decay.

Maple

With a fair amount of internal damping and low velocity, maple is most commonly used for guitar necks and body caps. Acoustic builders consider it acoustically 'transparent' so when used for acoustic backs and sides, the brightness is more attributable to the guitar's top than the maple.

It's commonly held that maple caps add brightness to Les Paul Standards, but in reality they probably dampen down the bass and low mids of the more lively mahogany to create a clearer and purer tone rather than add brightness. If in doubt, try playing a nice lightweight SG or LP Special acoustically and you'll get the idea.

Ash

Some of the very finest and very worst electric guitars of all time have been made from ash. Fender began using it in the early 1950s because it was cheap and readily available, and the vivid grain looked really good under translucent finishes.

A maple cap and mahogany back is the classic recipe for a Les Paul

Although sonic characteristics are attributed to certain tonewoods, there can be enormous variation

Mahogany

Factor in acoustics and electrics, and mahogany must be the most widely used wood in guitar making. When employed for acoustic backs and sides it's not as bright or deep as rosewood, but many prefer the woodier toned midrange and the softer attack due to slower velocity.

During the Depression, some guitars makers began making 'affordable' acoustics with mahogany soundboards. Their sweet and slightly dark sonic character proved popular and mahogany topped acoustics have become sought after by blues and roots players.

Mahogany is also used for necks and electric bodies. All-mahogany electrics can be lively, resonant and harmonically loaded guitars. Lightweight Honduran mahogany is the pinnacle, but fantastic results can be had with other types such as African (sapele) and Fijian.

Although some early Teles were heavy, the lighter ones are associated with an acoustically lively quality that has natural compression plus plenty of depth and twangy brightness combined with scooped mids. Lighter ash bodies tend to be sold as swamp ash – whether it was harvested from swamps or not.

Fender went back to ash during the 1970s, but used cheaper construction-grade northern ash. Often referred to as 'baseball bat ash', it's heavier and far less resonant. For a bright and cutting tone with tight bass it's certainly suitable, but if you're looking for a vintage spec T-style ash body, try to buy one weighing 2kg or less.

Alder

During the latter half of the 1950s Fender phased out ash because it was time consuming and difficult to achieve a flat finish using traditional methods. Again the company went for a readily available timber that had little or no track record being used in instrument manufacture.

Alder is much easier to finish – the appearance is a light reddish brown with fairly plain grain pattern and the stuff Fender used prior to the CBS takeover tended to be fairly light. Compared to swamp ash the midrange is warmer and fuller, but there's less snap and twang. Sustain can be impressive and it remains the most popular tonewood for S-style and T-style guitars.

Ebony

Ebony is mostly used for acoustic bridges, peghead overlays and fingerboards. In guitar making, ebony with a uniformly black appearance is sought after and its inherent hardness makes it durable as a fingerboard material.

Some high-end builders use highly figured Macassar ebony for acoustic backs and sides despite it having a very low velocity. It's mostly used for larger bodied acoustics, such as the Greven Prairie State, where the top can do most of the heavy lifting and the ebony's internal damping can provide thump rather than sustain.

Koa

Since it's native to the Hawaiian islands, koa has most often been used for ukuleles, Weissenborns and guitars designed to be played in the Hawaiian style. It's a light brown wood that can display plain grain as well as the most spectacular figuring and has a fairly high velocity.

Similarly, the tonal characteristics can vary from warm to bright when used for acoustic guitar back and sides. Some describe the tone as woodier and fuller in the mids than mahogany but not as deep as rosewood. Hawaiian-style guitars usually have koa tops, too, and builders such as Suhr offer spectacular koa solidbodies.

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Chord Clinic

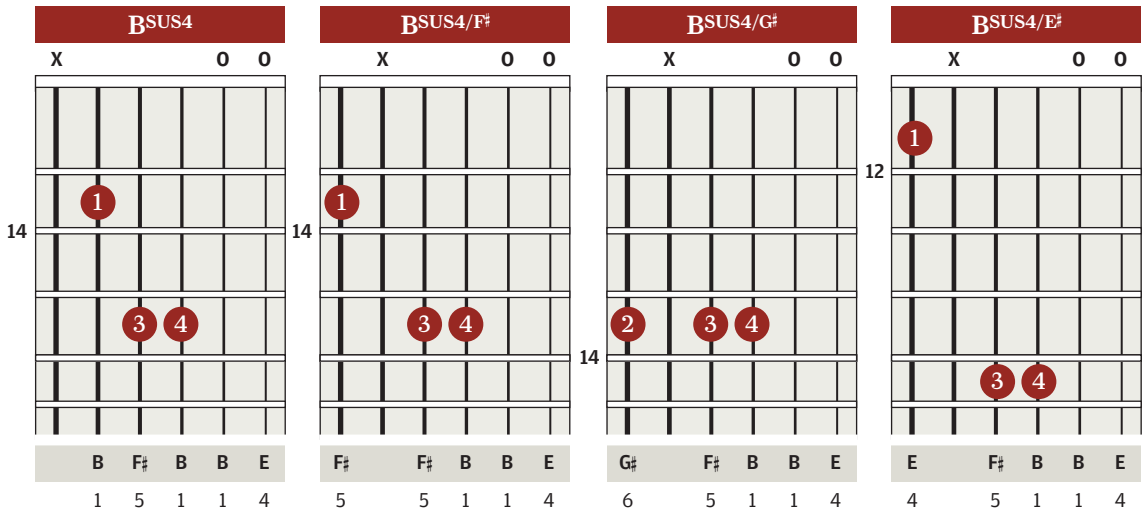
High position chords can create some intriguing textures when mixed with open strings. **ROD FOGG** aims high...

This month's Chord Clinic expands on the theme that we've been following over the last few instalments, namely the effect of mixing fretted notes and open strings in chord voicings. This month's examples are almost all above the 12th fret, so you'll need a guitar with a deep cutaway – we're thinking more electric than acoustic in this session.

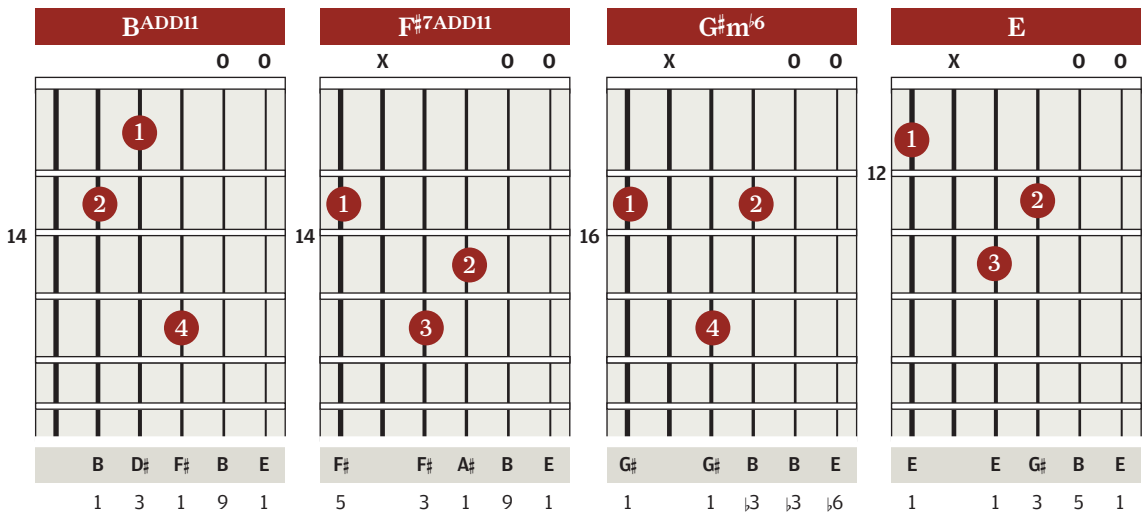
Figure 1 kicks off with some high position Bsus4 chords, and a bassline outlining the classic I-V-VI-IV progression so frequently used in pop music. It sounds good strummed with a clean tone and plenty of down strokes, eight to a bar. Watch that you don't hit the low E string when you are strumming that first chord, but muting the A string should happen naturally with the underside of the finger in the other three chords. The final chord is a bit of a stretch but it's not too hard unless you are used to dangling the guitar somewhere down around your knees.

You could try it with arpeggios, too. At this point, we usually leave it to you to make something up, but on this occasion we have some more precise instructions for you. Try picking a four-note pattern starting on the A string, then D string, G string and back to D string. Now play another four-note pattern this time starting on the top E string (that's the skinny one) and descending back to the D string via the B and G strings. That's eight notes in all. With each chord, all that changes

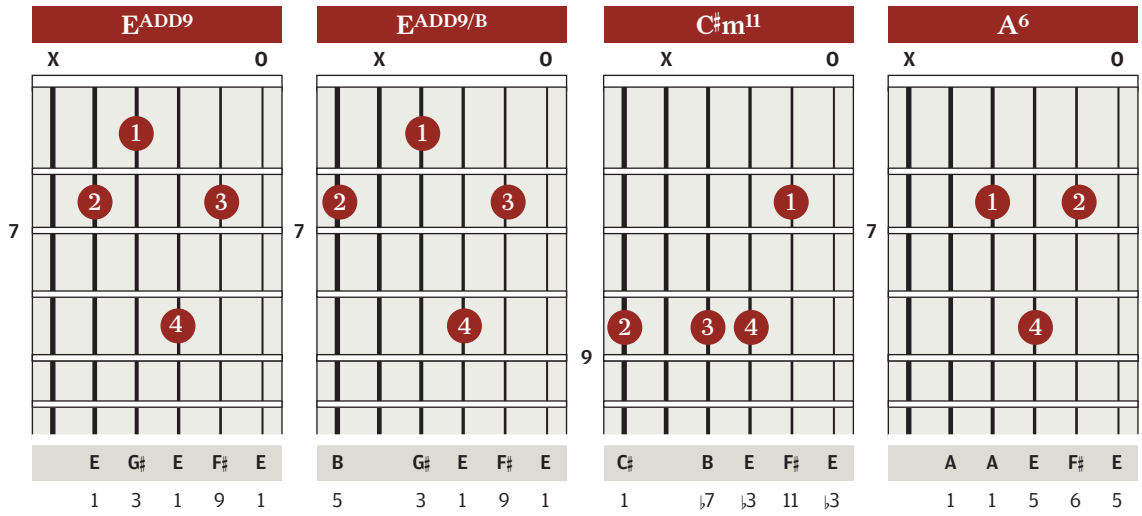
Moving Bass I-V-VI-IV (Fig 1)



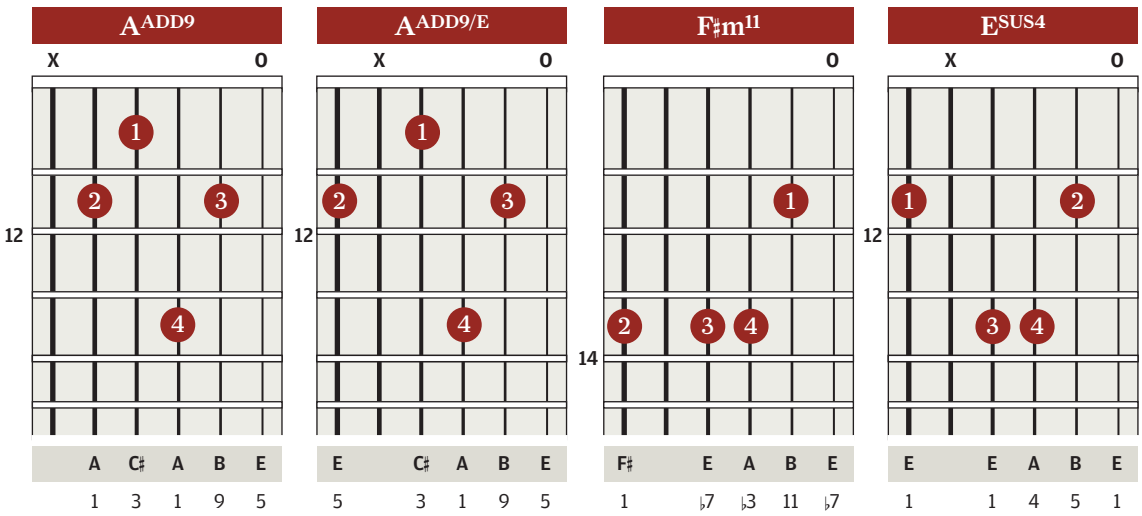
Full Chord I-V-VI-IV (Fig 2)



Taking It Down (Fig 3)



Moving On Up (Fig 4)



is that you always pick the bass note of the chord first. That means you play one note on the A string and three notes on the low E string. This picking pattern establishes the bass note and the basic tonality of the chord before introducing the suspension on the open E string.

Figure 2 travels around the same chord sequence, but this time instead of just moving the bass note we have enough notes to suggest the full chord – mainly the root note in the bass and the third higher up. Once again, this one will sound good with a chiming clean tone both strummed and picked. Try the same arpeggio pattern as we used in figure 1. We've called the third chord here G♯m♭6, but as there is no D♯ in this chord (in other words the fifth is omitted) you could also call it E/G♯, meaning an E with a G♯ bass note.

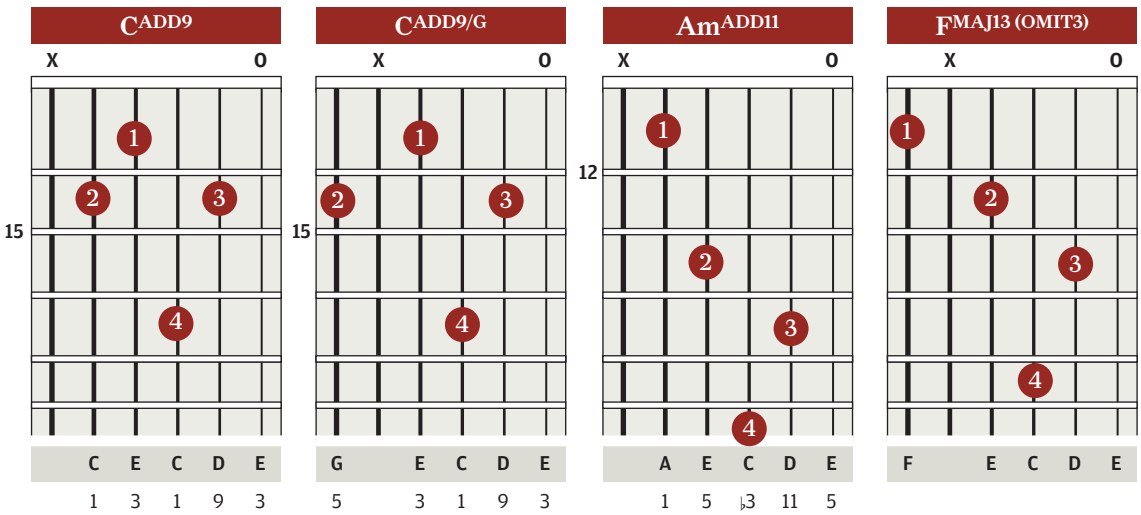
Keeping the top E string open and adding a note on the B string works well in the key of E. For figure 3, we have moved down to the seventh fret, but kept the same chord sequence of I-V-VI-IV. The arpeggio pattern from figure 1 really comes into its own with this sequence, as the persistent F♯ on the seventh fret of the B string sounds good against the open E string. At this point you could go back and experiment with re-ordering the chords in these three examples – moving the second chord to the end of the sequence works particularly well.

High position chords were the starting point for this month's Chord Clinic, so figure 4 slides the chords from figure 3 five frets up the guitar to the area around the 12th fret. The first three chords are effectively the same shapes, but we have chosen to re-voice the fourth chord using the 12th fret E instead of an open string and adding the suspended fourth. This maintains the character of the progression, which is dependent to a large extent on the slight dissonance between the B note on the 12th fret and the A on the 14th fret, mixed in with the chiming open E.

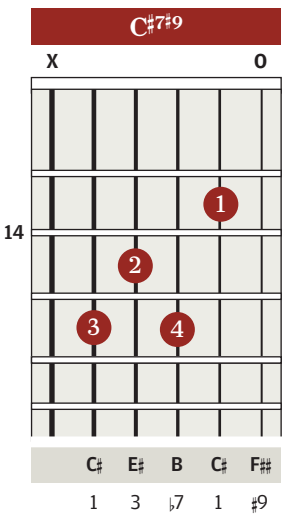
As you've no doubt noticed already, the higher up the guitar neck you get, the closer together the frets get. While this can be a struggle if you have big hands, it does make it easier to do some stretches and chord voicings that would be difficult elsewhere. Figure 5 takes us to C major and the area around the 15th fret. In many ways we have returned to our starting position, with just a moving bassline guiding us round the chords, but this time taking advantage of the big stretch that is possible down to the 12th fret on the A string. As before, try it strummed and picked and enjoy the rich texture you can produce using chord shapes like these. Maybe try some gentle tremolo and chorus, too.

Finally, as an antidote to all the chimey clean strumming and complex fingerpicking so far, Figure 6 is intended to be strummed in a funky, percussive style, and is just a two chord groove with a touch of added interest from the open E string. Count it off... and take it to the bridge. See you next month!

Back To The Start (Fig 5)



Funky Strums (Fig 6)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: DIY attenuation, bespoke Brit luthiery and a man who loves beer...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Hail To The Ale

Hi *TGM*, just wanted to say that I think you are doing the right thing re-naming the mag to *The Guitar Magazine*. It has a better ring to it, and I think it will appeal to a wider audience, and hopefully sell more copies and subscriptions for you!

Please don't change your format too much though, as your magazine is the best common sense and informative guitar magazine out there for us to buy at present. That said, it would nice if you could feature more articles on the history of guitar makers like Yamaha, Tokai, and so on and also continue with the workshop articles on other guitars – it's really good fun!

Finally, you mentioned that your new art editor fella is a craft beer expert. Now, as we all love a beer, could I suggest you do a page on it every issue – you could have a guest ale to enjoy the issue with every month? After all, we all play better with a beer or two in us, don't we?! ***Ken Willis***, via email

TGM Thanks for the kind words, Ken. The name might have changed and we'll continue to evolve, but it'll still be the same magazine you know and love. As for your idea of featuring craft beer in the magazine – you are preaching to the choir! It's definitely something we'll consider doing in some way or another. Enjoy a free tuner for your trouble. As for everyone else reading this, do let us know if the idea of a small regular column on craft beer wets your whistle. And anyone who comes up with a better name than Hop Stars wins a prize!

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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**Letter of the month prize is subject to availability and may change*

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Bat Man

Hi, saw your message on Facebook about sending pics of our personal guitars, and thought I would send details of my John Birch custom 'Bat' guitar. I first ordered a white Birch SG-style guitar back in October 1972, and collected it the following March.

A few years later, I was looking through John's latest brochure and saw a picture of the Bat in white, and instantly fell in love! Coincidentally, my original Birch had developed a serious problem, so I took it back to him and asked him to build me a Bat guitar in exchange for the faulty SG. He was reluctant – the original Bat was a custom-order, and he insisted it would be too heavy. I persevered however, and after building a scaled down version of the Bat for Dave Hill of Slade, he relented and built one for me, too.

When I picked up the Bat, John also gave me a body blank that had been shaped, but hadn't glued properly, so they had to start again. Years later, I met John Diggins of Jaydee guitars, who had worked for Birch back in the day, and asked him if he could make the blank into another Bat. He fitted some Seymour Duncan pickups and control knobs, added a birdseye maple fretboard and finished it in white, just like the one I'd seen all those years ago!

I've tried to find other Bats over the years, but they're very scarce – John Diggins confirmed that while he worked with John Birch, only the original model and two scaled down Bats were ever made! ***Gordon Beresford***, via email

TGM That's one unique guitar you have, Gordon – thanks for sharing!

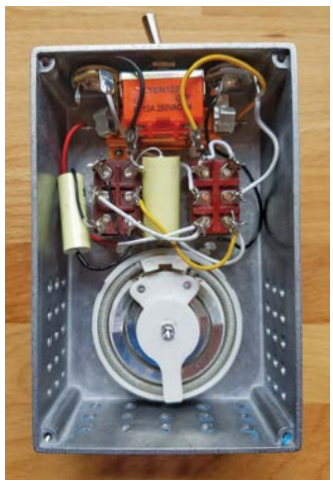
Going To Eleven

Dear *TGM*, I loved Huw's article about the Elevenator attenuator, and I decided to have a go myself. It took some time to source all the parts, since I found the listed sources were a bit too cumbersome to use. But I found the parts here and there, and now the project is finally completed!

Living in an apartment, this attenuator is brilliant! I have some excellent valve amps, and now I can enjoy the sound of pushed valves at neighbour-friendly levels! Given that this project is relatively cheap, and easy to assemble, I'm sure a lot of other *TGM* readers would have great pleasure in building their own, too! Of course, you can always buy an attenuator, but building it yourself is definitely something special!

By the way, 'Flaskehals' is Norwegian for 'bottle neck', hinting at how the signal is 'choked' on the way! A big thanks to Huw for this project, and I hope more are on the way! ***Fred Knoph***, via email

TGM Hats off to you Fred – Huw is delighted to see people making practical use of his Workshops! If anyone else fancies having a go then visit bit.ly/elevenator



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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven releases and reissues

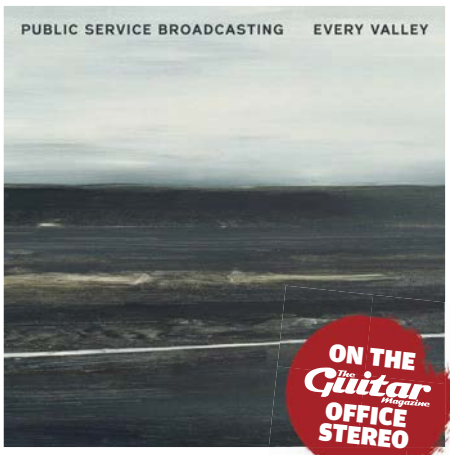
Broken Social Scene

HUG OF THUNDER

After a seven-year hiatus, Canadian indie-rockers Broken Social Scene have returned, and in force. A whopping 15 members of the band's 30-plus list of alumni – including the vocal talents of Leslie Feist and Metric's Emily Haines – have banded together with founders Brendan Canning and Kevin Drew with the stated aim of injecting a dose of positivity into an increasingly dark world. *Hug Of Thunder* is a 12-track prescription of just that – a sparkling, varied record that mixes the joyful bombast of the likes of *Halfway Home* with ethereal slow-burners such as the title track to sublime effect. Regardless of the optimistic vibe, however, there's a density to the production that elevates this to another level, while the interplay between the frequently melodic, dynamic basslines and the measured, atmospheric guitar consistently invites a closer listening. A truly welcome return. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Do Make Say Think, Feist*



Public Service Broadcasting

EVERY VALLEY

You'd be forgiven for thinking that PSB's blend of proggy guitar and electronica mixed with vintage Public Information Film samples had run out of surprises. However, *Every Valley*'s concept – telling the tale of the rise and fall of the South Wales coal industry through the prism of the ordinary people living through it – adds newfound emotional depth to the recipe. Recorded in Ebbw Vale and with Welsh musicians – including James Dean Bradfield – guesting throughout, it adds an authenticity that grounds each bluesy guitar line and dissonant howling bend in the story they're telling. It enables PSB to sensitively tell the tale of a dark moment in recent history, and as the defiance and solidarity of the miners and their families slowly gives way to an acceptance of inevitable defeat, it's impossible not to be moved. It's a challenging, emotive listen, but a timely and important one, too. **JG**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Lemon Jelly, Death In Vegas*

Royal Blood

HOW DID WE GET SO DARK

Royal Blood's 2014 debut was a shot in the arm for UK rock music, but the pressure is always on after such a meteoric rise – how do you follow it up? Thankfully, the opener and title track is a meaty, succinct salvo of crushing octave-bass riffery that extinguishes any fears that the two-piece have embarked on an ill-advised reinvention, but the breezy 'oohs' do point to a band trying to evolve. Things do take a funkier turn at times – *She's Creeping* throws in a pitch-bend bass effect, some gloriously gnarly fuzz, shakers and new-found falsetto from Kerr – but it works. It's Royal Blood alright, but with a groove, and it's also the album's highlight. The occasional misstep aside, the pair maintain their knack for economy, meaning that nothing outstays its welcome, and with the difficult second album successfully negotiated, the path to megastardom continues to beckon... **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Queens Of The Stone Age, Muse*

Kenny Wayne Shepherd Band

LAY IT ON DOWN

KWS's eighth solo album is a Southern US radio-programmer's dream. The Nashville-steeped title track, the pedal-steel-soaked *Hard Lesson Learned* and lighters-aloft ballad, *Louisiana Rain* will soundtrack many a trucker's interstate journey; while *Nothing But The Night* sees him branch out into 80s AOR territory. His tones are flawless; and he wrings every drop out of the Texas-blues lead guitar template, but he's mainly refining rather than reinventing here. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *SRV, John Mayer, Philip Sayce*

Sonny Landreth

RECORDED LIVE AT LAFAYETTE

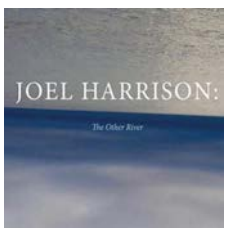
This is Landreth's first live album for 12 years, and it is divided into acoustic and electric halves. The unplugged side sees him exploring his back catalogue zydeco-style, with a backing from ukulele bass, cajon, accordion and acoustic, and stretching out in a version of *Key To The Highway*. The second half showcases the slide star's electric technique in a trio setting, with delayed slide workout *True Blue* the standout. Plugged in or not, this is a master at work. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ry Cooder, JJ Cale, Tedeschi Trucks Band*

Joel Harrison

THE OTHER RIVER



For his 18th studio album, the veteran US jazz guitarist has taken a left turn. These 11 tracks run the gamut of folky Americana, peppering tales of love and loss with Harrison's guitar talents. From delicate fingerpicked acoustic and pedal-steel on *My Beautiful Enemy* to silky Hammond-backed electric lines on *You're What Matters To Me*, each song shows a different facet of Harrison's skills, but his sensitive arrangements stop this descending into show and tell. **GJ**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jason Isbell, Ry Cooder*

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Joe Bonamassa

The blues-rock hero on kicking down doors, hating acoustic guitars, and always watching your money...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I'm not that attached to things, but there's a sunburst 1960 Les Paul, and out of all the Les Pauls I own, it sounds the best. If I was stuck on a desert island, that would be the guitar. It's not mint condition – it's just a great instrument. There's a reason why it's beat up! 'Cause I wasn't the first person to figure out that it's killer!"

2 In another life I would be...
"I probably would have been some kind of law enforcement – I'd be the guys kicking down the doors, going after the bad guys. It just always kinda intrigued me."

3 The moment it all started...
"I was four – my dad would play Clapton records, and I was like, 'This is the coolest thing in the world!' I wanted to make that sound – I always loved electric guitar. I was not into acoustics – still not! I'm a self-loathing acoustic player – even though I have an acoustic record out! Truth be told, I hate the fuckin' things!"

4 The one that got away...
"My dad helped out this guy at a guitar show called Bill who was building these gold pedals called Klons and selling them out of his car. He needed an amp for people to try them, so my father let him sit in the booth with us. After, Bill said, 'Do I owe you anything?' and he was like, 'Just give Joe one of the pedals'. So I had this Klon, but I've never been a fan. Then, when I was 19 I took it to one of my first session gigs, with John Leventhal, and he was intrigued by the Klon. Because I was so happy to be there hanging out with real musicians, I just gave it to him! I think it was number 10 or 12 that he made."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Oh jeez, I remember the tour we did in 2002 – we first got a tour bus, but the tour wasn't selling *at all*. We thought we were rock stars, but then we'd show up to empty rooms! I remember popping in *This Is Spinal Tap* into the VHS on the bus, and we're watching it, and I'm thinking, 'Y'know their tour's going better than ours!'"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"BB King told me, 'Keep doing what you're doing, don't change for anyone, and watch your money.' He was right on all points!"

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I just kinda noodle. A good chord for tuning on a new amp or a guitar is an A chord with the added five. So that's always the first thing I play, just to make sure it's in tune! "

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"You can keep all the booze and red M&Ms you want, but if there's no Diet Cokes I'm not thrilled with how the day is going."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"I'm the biggest Bruce Hornsby fan – I don't consider it a guilty pleasure, but it's outside of the genre of what I'm supposed to like. We had Bruce on our cruise last year – I was talking to him and he was just astounded that I knew all the old songs, and I was like, 'Dude, I told you – I'm a fucking *fan*, y'know?'"

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I've never been able to learn *Cliffs Of Dover*. For somebody who rips off Eric Johnson as freely as I do, you'd figure I'd know it – but I can't play it! [laughs] What gets me all twisted is legato – I'm not a legato player, but a lot of that Eric Johnson is a cross between picking every note and a lot of legato, and I just can't get my head around it!"

Joe Bonamassa's *Live At Carnegie Hall: An Acoustic Evening* is out now on J&R Adventures

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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